

Identity, Faith, and Conflict

Essays on Pakistan and Beyond

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Raza Rumi



For Fariduddin and Noor Jehan

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Introduction

As a journalist and media commentator, Raza Rumi publishes with frequency, responding to continuing troubling events in South Asia. As a policy analyst, he goes beyond the immediate situation to examine the systems and history behind these conditions. And as a Pakistani Muslim, he writes with compassionate patriotism for his country, seeking avenues of reform and renewal.

His 12 essays gathered in this collection display his facility in a range of writing styles — from scholarly to journalistic, analytical to personal. They originally appeared in journals, newspapers, and institute publications — in Pakistan, India, England, and the United States. The earliest dates from 2008, but the rest were published between 2012 and 2015, in the months before and after the March 2014 assault on Rumi's life. And so they offer a glimpse of his public views expressed while in Pakistan, as well as his continued outspokenness in exile.

In Islamabad that March, Taliban operatives attacked his car in an assassination attempt, which Rumi survived but which took the life of his driver. In view of the imminent danger, in April he left Pakistan and joined family in the U.S. Since September 2015, he has been hosted by Ithaca City of Asylum, teaching as an international scholar in residence in Ithaca College's Honors Program and since fall 2016 at the Cornell Institute for Public Affairs. He continues to publish abroad and blog regularly about conditions in Pakistan and South Asia.

As an intellectual and progressive who has lived through successive military and weak civilian regimes, Rumi has consistently taken a rationalist stance in his writing and televised commentary. Despite his country being seen, as he says, a "South Asian menace," his lodestar is the vision of a modern, secular state advanced in 1947 by Pakistan's founding father, Muhammad Ali Jinnah. It's a far cry from what emerged, as he writes, "the tragic consequence of the nation-state using religion as the sole marker of its identity."

Rumi consistently argues for a fair system of democratic governance, a Pakistani state that must uphold both its ideals and laws. He struggles for an inclusive and tolerant nation, against excess and extremism. This balanced, liberal belief is shared by other Pakistanis (including many in exile) even as many others adhere to a conservative Islam and ideal of a theocratic state — a paradoxical society, much as in neighboring Iran.

In these particular essays, Rumi examines what it means to be

Muslim in Pakistan today, how to define oneself in a contradictory and volatile society where zealotry turns to discrimination, exclusion, and even murder. For a Western and particularly a United States reader, he offers a unique look into the complex social, political, and religious practices that inform contemporary Pakistan.

We learn of the persecution of the Ahmadiyya community, practicing Muslims whom the state defines as non-Muslims; of the damage inflicted by the rigid and xenophobic *madrassa* system of education; of the radicalism of multiple jihadist factions. Rumi examines Pakistan's postcolonial legacy, successive constitutions, political factionalism, and the inherent instability of an Islamic republic of some 200 million people, half of whom are illiterate, with profoundly conflicting social agendas. Through his analysis, we move toward a more nuanced understanding of Pakistan today.

We also apprehend the uncertain and wrenching emotional state of being bereft of one's country. In several of these essays, Rumi writes movingly of being displaced, of the life of an exile, of the *mehfils* or gatherings with other South Asians where their culture is remembered, shared, and sustained.

Personal freedom, free speech, and other civil liberties in a safe, secular state may seem a long way off. But with 63 percent of Pakistanis being under the age of 25, Rumi expresses his belief in the youth of his country and his hope for the changes that can and must come about. It seems fitting that refusing silence, he closes this collection with "Reclaiming One's Voice," which itself ends with his trust in survival.

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Shifting the Boundaries: Revisiting Islam and Muslimness

Muslimness is an elusive state of being. There are watertight strictures of the theological identity defined by men on the one hand, and the broad political and cultural sense of the self on the other. Identity, in any case, is a messy affair: shifty, shifting, and eventually imagined. While 9/11 placed Muslims at the center stage of global politics, the broth had already been simmering in the cauldrons of biased academe and pop reality mirrored through the bloodthirsty lens of corporate media.

So what is it to be a Muslim? An inflexible bag of rituals? Or a cultural sense of belonging? Or a deeper dogma ingrained in young minds? I have never considered myself anything but a believer, a “practicing Muslim.” This has never been at variance with my secular and inclusive pretensions, despite the fact that the clergy in my country considers secularism akin to atheism, a sort of mirror image of the Pakistani political foundation. The clerics translate secular as *la-deen*, at best irreligious and at worst godless.

Ironical that this business of religious identity is articulated in a land that was the crucible of the secular Indus valley civilization, nonmilitant Buddhism, and a peculiar version of South Asian Islam that spread via the Sufi *khanqahs* (retreats) and was a sort of amalgam of the Central Asian with the ancient South Asian. Even more ironical is the reality, neglected and veiled, that the lived Islam is located around *dargahs* (Sufi shrines), tribal codes, and customs that are irreligious in their own way. But who cares? Referred to as the world’s most dangerous country, Pakistan, according to the pundits of global opinion, is a haven for Islamic terrorists. Collateral damage, therefore, is permissible and a necessity to undo the unstated part of the “axis of evil.”¹

Labels and more labels. On the global shelves, such products sell well and work in the favor of a war machine hungry for energy resources, territory, and blood.

It was a glorious autumnal afternoon when a United Nations colleague rushed into my room in a ramshackle municipal building south of Kosovo, not far from the bastions of orthodox Christianity in northern Kosovo and Serbia. “Planes have hit the World Trade Center,” he said. An hour later we were glued to the television sets.

The greatest cliché of our times is how 9/11 changed every- thing. And like many other clichés, this was true — at least for Muslims across the globe. For weeks, I lived among endless debates and hushed insinuations about the global Muslim problem.

All of a sudden my Indian colleague, a closeted Bharatiya Janata Party supporter, threw down the gauntlet of my messed-up identity as a Pakistani Muslim, which had suddenly become a South Asian menace. In every drawing-room conversation, we were described as inheritors of the barbarian invaders. The script was being polished for all that was to follow. The Westerners in the United Nations mission, though, were more careful with their choice of words. They privately confessed the folly of engaging with the Taliban. I was quick to remind whoever would care to listen that *jihad* and Taliban were political instruments and not the Muslim behavioral archetype.

The Kosovars, too, were stunned. Overwhelmingly Muslims, they shared no cultural affinity with the Taliban brand of Islam. Kabul was thousands of miles away, and they only had a vague empathy with the bombed Afghans, especially the nameless civilians who, trapped in crossfire, had nowhere to go.

We had a mosque next to the municipality building, a grand structure in the Turkish-Ottoman style. I attended several Friday prayers whose simplicity was no match for the boisterous South Asian ritual. Old men with Turkish caps were dressed to pray while most all the believers wore Western clothes. What got me wondering was the mosque leader, a gregarious man who was found in the local pub during the never-ending evenings of that small town. This was a little unpalatable for a Pakistani. One day I asked him about his rationale for blending alcohol with Islamic practices. There was laughter in response.

I never got a rational answer.

At the Jakarta airport, I noticed a letter from the Interior Ministry pasted on the wall. It directed airport authorities that nationals of countries such as Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, and yes, Pakistan needed security clearance before the issuance of visas.² This was a shock to my notions of Islamic brotherhood as fed to us by school textbooks and the media. The official explained my potential security threat in a roundabout way. I was irked that this was happening to me at the Jakarta airport, not JFK or Heathrow. Making an effort at self-control, I managed to get out of the situation quickly. It helped to invoke Islamic fraternity and show resentment towards the Western media’s stereotyping tendencies. Though what really was the quick ticket to avoid harassment was probably the work-status cards of an international development organization that I was carrying.

As we drove through the capital of the most populous Islamic nation, the lack of religious symbolism was unbelievable. There was hardly any show of Islam, despite the fact that this nation is home to several active fundamentalist groups. The bar signs and thronging tourists made the culture appear inclusive and liberal. My next destination was

Yogyakarta (aka Jogja), a city that defines the spiritual nodes of Indonesia's most populated and influential Java Island.

Jogja's physical and cultural landscape derives directly from the omnipresent and living volcano, Mount Merapi. The place has grown under its awe-inspiring shadow for 10,000 years. Villagers living on its slopes refuse to leave, even though the last time the volcano erupted was just two years ago. They are bound by the mystical powers attributed to the mountain, powers seen through lightning, thunderous clouds, and days of ash-rain. This paganism mixes with the locals' devotion to Islam in an unexpected and fascinating form. On Friday, mosques are full of devotees, and as they rise from their prayers, the social chitchat alludes to magical stories and the powers of Mount Merapi. How are such devout Muslims so steeped in their local culture? This must be the South Asian Muslim identity crisis, I thought.

While in Jogja, I chanced upon a book called *Mysticism in Java*,³ written by the anthropologist Niels Mulder. The author traces Javanese mysticism from prehistoric times to the modern. According to Mulder, the mix of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Javanese animistic belief systems was a fertile ground for the rise of Islam in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The mystical essentials were close to Islam's message of unity of being and its emphasis on inner spirituality. Jogja is also the seat of the Borobudur temple complex. Built between the seventh and eighth centuries, it was the spiritual center of Buddhism in this part of the world. An aerial view of the Borobudur shows its geometric *mandala* design, a Hindu-Buddhist symbol for the microcosm of the universe. Not far from Borobudur is Prambanan. This is a magnificent ninth-century temple designed for Shiva, which also honors Vishnu and Brahma — the famous trinity of Hinduism. On full moon nights, the Ramayana ballet, inspired by the epic, is staged here. Music and dance are central to Javanese life. The richness and cultural heterogeneity of this country is truly marvelous.

Women's participation in Indonesian public life is extremely high. One sees huge numbers of women with their heads covered in scarves, going about the business of life casually and confidently. I contrasted this with the misogynists back home, whose first feature of an ideal Islamic system entails locking women in the house. While returning, I stopped at a music shop. Hundreds of languages and dialects, thousands of islands and subcultures make Indonesia a complex, rich environ. As a Pakistani, I found the inclusive version of Islam practiced here inspiring. Neither at odds with local cultures nor busy reinventing history, it celebrates its traditions as much as its faith. In fact, the defunct Mu'tazila⁴ movement, rationalists of the medieval times, is very much alive in the country. I was told that the recent bombings in Bali were an aberration and were offshoots of imperial projects launched by the Western countries elsewhere.

Pakistan celebrates Allama Iqbal's birth and death anniversary (1877-1938) in an annual ritual of official platitudes, making this national poet into the ideologue of the two-nation theory. But Iqbal's progressive, indeed revolutionary views embodied in his passionate poetry are now buried under the dead weight of clichés. For instance, Iqbal disdained mullahism, celebrated the living principle of movement and vitality in Islamic thought, and emphasized *ijtihad* (intellectual/scholarly interpretation) of Islamic teachings

through a modern parliamentary framework. Lack of *ijtihad* has since impoverished the development of Islamic thought.

It is indeed a tragic irony that in the homeland Iqbal dreamt of, the mouths of those talking of *ijtihad* are forced shut by the very religious zealots whom he was ridiculed by. In *Zarb-e-Kalim*, Iqbal writes:

Your prayer cannot change the Order of the Universe, But it is possible that praying will alter your being;
If there is a revolution in your inner Self
It will not be strange, then, if the whole world changes too.⁵

In the famous series of lectures, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Iqbal held:

...but since things have changed and the world of Islam is today confronted and affected by new forces set free by the extraordinary development of human thought in all its directions, I see no reason why this attitude (finality of legal schools) should be maintained any longer. Did the founders of our schools ever claim finality for their reasoning and interpretations? Never. ...The teaching of the Quran that life is a process of progressive creation necessitates that each generation, guided but unhampered by the work of its predecessor, should be permitted to solve its own problems.⁶

The thirteenth-century poet Rumi and twentieth-century Iqbal communicated a shared message: *de'dan day'gar amuz, shan'idan day'gar amuz* (learn to see and think in a new way). As scholar Suroosh Irfani writes eloquently, this “message sums up an outlook of life as a forward assimilative movement, even as one remains rooted in an Islamic heritage. Indeed, the message arose in a historical context when old certainties were crumbling and the new were struggling to be born: Rumi lived at a time when the Muslim world was traumatized by Mongol invasions, while Iqbal’s was a time of the colonized masses awakening that eventually led to the independence of India and Pakistan.”⁷ What Pakistan appears today is not the dream that Iqbal articulated for a separate homeland for Muslims of India. The extremists who now wave their flags on government buildings propagate a version of Islam that Iqbal always resisted.

...

Fourteen centuries ago, it was Hussain, the grandson of Muhammad, who led the dissent against the emergence of the Islamic Empire and Church, and his martyrdom made

him an everlasting symbol of egalitarianism and democracy. Hussain, his family, and associates gave up their lives struggling to uphold the right of Muslims to select their leader, to resist the emergence of monarchy, and to protect the central Islamic tenet of brotherhood and redistributive justice.

But the ruling classes undid a tribal republic created by the Prophet (Peace be upon him), where blacks, the poor, non-Arabs, and minorities co-existed with Arab Muslims. Hussain died helpless, calling for support not just from the treacherous residents of Kufa but from future generations. As I've previously written, "This is why Iqbal cried years later that the blood of Hussain had created a garden (of liberation) challenging tyranny for all times to come."⁸

When Islam founded an Empire, a clergy was born that had no room within the revolutionary faith that evolved in Makkah and Medina. The leading scholars were coerced or co-opted by the Empire. The horrific treatments meted out to the dissenting scholars such as Imam Malik and Abu Hanifa testify to this distortion.

The clerics who compiled Islamic Law under the Abbasids made a firm alliance with kings and added the "apostasy *fatwa*" against any movement that challenged the Abbasid kingdom. Sufis, philosophers, and scholars all got their share of killings at the hands of the monarchical state that Hussain challenged at Kerbala.

The tragedy in Kerbala — when the Prophet's grandson and his family members were murdered — also affected the intellectual discourse on the freedom-determinism debates. Abu Sa'id ibn Abi al- Hasan Yasar al-Basri⁹ declared that man was totally responsible for his actions. He argued this position in a letter addressed to the Umayyad caliph, Abd al-Malik. This famous letter attacked the widely held acceptance of determinism and reiterated that early theological disputes were largely related to the struggles against despotism and oppression. The debate that followed the Kerbala tragedy matured to an intellectual wrangling between scholarly movements: Mu'tazila trying to give a rationally coherent account of Islamic beliefs and Ash'ariyya reacting against this excessive rationalism. Thus the anti-monarchy debates ensued within the faith.

In the words of Ali Shariati: "Martyrdom is a death which is... selected with all of the awareness, logic, reasoning, intelligence, understanding, consciousness and alertness that a human being has."¹⁰

...

Even a brief visit to Malaysia is enough to explode the spin-doctored myths woven by the mainstream Western media portraying Muslims as intolerant and inward looking. In the 1980s, Malaysia, under the shaping hand of the charismatic Mahathir Mohamad, emerged as an economic miracle. The country gained independence a decade after Pakistan's independence and at the time was poorer than most developing countries. Yet during the 21-year rule of Mahathir Mohamad, it transformed into a prosperous and progressive place, a testament to plurality and co-existence within the Islamic framework. Malaysia's 25 million strong population is a baffling mix of Malays, Chinese, Indians, Ibans, and Kadazandusuns, among others. The Malays constitute a marginal majority (over 50 per cent) of the total population and are in general practicing Muslims, while the other groups practice their beliefs with equal freedom.¹¹

Kuala Lumpur is dotted with mosques, temples, and churches. People from all cultural backgrounds have contributed in making Malaysia what it is today. The country's socio-cultural development carries important lessons for Muslim states and societies.

Notwithstanding this impressive achievement, Malaysia has its own share of communal tensions: The northeastern Kelantan state — not enjoying the same fruits of economic progress as the rest of Malaysia — is ruled by Islamists. Kelantan has a history of political instability and frequent change of government, and the general opinion, including those of its sympathizers, is that it has no chance of impacting the political landscape in the rest of the country. Though authoritarian, Mahathir gained legitimacy due to the consistent inclusive development that he delivered. His broad-based vision was often criticized for being too soft and inclusive on non-Muslims. Striking evidence of cultural inclusion is reflected by the 16 million tourists who visit Malaysia each year, bloating its economy. The country's campaign to market itself as exotic, with its complementary catchy slogan "Malaysia — truly Asia," works like a charm on the mind of tourists worldwide.

The issue of women's participation in the Islamic context has to be given special emphasis due to the negative coverage it has attained in the international press. In Malaysia, as in Indonesia, women are a numerous and visible working force. The civil service staff is almost 50 percent women, and women in headscarves are commonly seen in hotels working as waitresses and receptionists. These modest yet equal participants in the country's economic and political life go to the mosques and pray in the same room as men. I wonder how a certain *maulvi* (cleric) I heard in Lahore would react, given his statement that the Almighty would not accept any prayers that a woman made outside the confines of her house.

...

Friday prayers in a Kuala Lumpur mosque were reminiscent of the traditional adherence to all stages of the ritual. There was Makkah towards the west; and here were people bowing down, standing up, and bowing down again. The difference, however, apart from the mosque's modern structure, was that the imam was using a laptop and flat screens to deliver the *khutba* (sermon) in Malay and English.

Malaysia, like any other society, is open to criticism too. The disproportionate

control of Malays over positions of power makes the minorities wary and resentful. On the other hand, Chinese are seen to be the most entrenched group in business, jealous of outsiders making inroads.

Mahathir has been rare among figures of authority in voluntarily leaving the seat of power during his lifetime to make space for others. He has also been a vociferous proponent of *ijtihad* in Islam. To quote from an interview he gave in 2006¹²:

Unfortunately, for a long time, they closed the door on *ishtihaar* (*itjihad*). But it is not something wrong, it has been done before. Perhaps we should revive that discussion...today we see Shias blowing up Sunni mosques, Sunnis blowing up Shia mosques, we see a lot of antagonism between the different sects and yet they all claim to be Muslims...they consider different sects as not being Islamic. But if we go back to the fundamental teachings of Islam, then we eliminate the differences in interpretation; perhaps it would be easier for us to get along together, to be brothers and sisters in Islam. In that way I think we can be united, and of course unity is strength, and at the same time we can utilize the whole potential of the Muslims.¹³

Citing Christianity's experience of reform, Mahathir also remarked:

They have Protestants, Catholics, they have Orthodox (Christians)... and the Catholics and Protestants have been known to fight it out in different small groups...In the past, they used to kill each other, they used to burn at the stakes because of differences in understanding and they tended to condemn others as heretics. But today, they are much more liberal. They don't question each other on the interpretation of the religion. What has happened to the Muslim religion is the same. There is fragmentation due to different interpretations.¹⁴

Mahathir's words are sharp and chilling. As a South Asian Muslim, I wonder who will assume the leadership with such a vision in a region that houses a multitude of the Muslim population — a disparate, heterogeneous mass of humanity that is both forward looking and maligned.

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The Prospects for Reform in Islam

The rise of global Islamism in the form of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) will pose a major challenge to the security of both Western and Muslim-majority nations for years to come. The threat is particularly acute in Muslim countries because of Islamism's capacity to claim that it represents Islam in its purest, truest form.

Importantly, the Islamist movement's power and appeal also derives from its ability to claim that it is advancing both justice and freedom — political ends that the majority of Muslims naturally want for themselves. Many Islamists are able to justify their struggle and their violence by presenting their agenda as the only legitimate pathway for social and political reform. Muslim societies thus face an ideological quagmire: They desperately need a reform agenda movement consistent with their deepest faith traditions, but they have yet to successfully formulate an alternative to Islamism that can sustain a pluralistic, participatory politics.

In recent years, the search for an alternative to Islamism has been thwarted by the widening sectarian conflict within Islam, which has increased tensions and driven violence across the Muslim world. In light of this emergency, the need to reform Islamic jurisprudence and social thought has thus become more urgent than ever. Islamism's menace to Muslims, however, has been compounded by the weakened state of critical thinking within Islamic religious and political traditions. In developing a reformist alternative to Islamism, Muslims do in fact have a substantial body of both historical as well as contemporary thinking that they can draw on to help improve their political and social structures and create more just, inclusive societies.

The Crisis Today

Islamism's vitality and appeal derive in part from the modern revival of two broad tendencies that run throughout the history of Islamic thought and practice. These include, first of all, the literalist approach to Islamic scripture that is propagated by modern Salafism, and, secondly, the revitalization of centuries-old sectarian tensions — especially between Sunni Islam and Shia Islam. Today, the resurgence of literalist interpretations of the *Sharia* and the worsening of sectarian cleavages within Islam have spawned a perpetual cycle of violence that directly endangers the lives of ordinary Muslims everywhere.

The general view propagated by Islamists of all varieties is that *Sharia* law is “divinely ordained” and cannot be questioned. *Sharia*, therefore, must be understood literally, and Islamists are driven by their belief that the *Sharia* represents a comprehensive political and belief system. Islamists view *Sharia* as the sole legitimate source of politics and government; consequently, they believe that *Sharia* must be enforced around the world by a powerful and expansive Islamic State. In achieving this end, Islamists have pursued transitional political goals through a variety of means, including proselytization and armed struggle. The immediate focus of their struggle is displacing Western-oriented elites and military forces in Muslim societies and, in effect, overthrowing what they view as

oppressive enemy regimes occupying Muslim societies. They believe that by thus merging “mosque and state,” their movement will pave the way for an Islamic State and eventually lead to the worldwide enforcement of *Sharia*.

The origins of modern-day Islamic extremism may be traced to nineteenth-century movements in the Arab world and South Asia that aimed to revive Islam as a political and social force. At the time, Islamism rose in response to apparent Muslim weakness relative to the British Empire and to the penetration of Western secular values into Muslim societies. Those associated with these revivalist movements preached what became an increasingly radical interpretation of the Islamic holy texts in order to advance their political objectives of pan-Islamic unity and the eventual adoption of *Sharia* law.¹⁵

What these nineteenth-century revivers and their heirs failed to recognize is that most of the legal codes and strictures that comprise the *Sharia* were developed during the ninth and tenth centuries of the great Abbasid Empire (750-1258) and thus two centuries after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. This body of traditional jurisprudence consists of the legal opinions of jurists who interpreted the Quran and the traditions of the prophets. As with all other manmade legal and political systems, these principles and values and interpretations should not be viewed as static but as dynamic and evolutionary, depending on their contexts.¹⁶ However, the literalist approach to the *Sharia* essentially froze its interpretation in time, with catastrophic results for Muslim jurisprudence and for Muslims themselves.¹⁷ As the scholar Ziauddin Sardar points out, the dominance of literalism made it so that believers became “passive receivers rather than active seekers of truth. In reality, the *Sharia* is nothing more than a set of principles, a framework of values, that provide Muslim societies with guidance.”¹⁸ This freezing of interpretation has falsely elevated *Sharia* to the status of divine text. Over centuries, this led to the legitimacy of — and demand for — a literalism that suspended human agency and sidestepped the requirements of a changing world.¹⁹ Concurrently, Islam also intermingled with state power as Muslim kingdoms sought to legitimize their rule with edicts from traditionalist clerics. For example, a hallmark of the legal codes is the concept of “apostasy,” which historically served to prevent rebellion against the state. Modern Islamists, whether organized as states in the cases of Saudi Arabia, the Islamic Republic in Iran, and Afghanistan under the Taliban, or as militias in the case of Boko Haram in West Africa, have exploited this antiquated aspect of traditional jurisprudence to enforce their own radical political agendas.

Throughout Islamic history, free Muslim thinkers raised their voices against the strict codification of Islamic thought and practice. But importantly, these alternative views faced stiff resistance and were frequently quashed. For example, the Islamic scholar and theologian Abu Ḥamid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazali (1058-1111) fiercely criticized the Muʿtazilite practice of subjecting Islamic theology to rationalism. Over time, the role of Muslim philosophers was significantly undercut. In 1017-18 and 1029, Abbasid Caliph al-Qadir (947-1031) issued widely cited decrees that banned the Muʿtazilite.²⁰ In order to snuff out dissent, the entire group was persecuted and their texts destroyed. Even today, centuries later, the works of Ibn al-Rawandi, Ibn Rushd, and al-Biruni — progressive and scientific Muslim thinkers in their times — are banned from the official curricula in Saudi Arabia and most Gulf states.²¹ Instead, only officially approved scholars and schools of jurisprudence are considered valid; their medieval writings and opinions constitute the core of twenty-first-century Islamic studies curricula.

Of the various Islamic schools of thought, Salafism — and its more contemporary manifestation, Wahhabism — typifies the fossilized *Sharia* literalism that treats manmade laws as divine. The term Salafism, derived from *al-salaf al-salih* (the pious ancestors), invokes the mode of Islam as practiced by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Its primary focus is on what constitutes appropriate religious and social behavior. This behavior is deduced from the Sunna (the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad compiled in the Hadith). All other variants of belief and practice are deemed *bida*, or undesirable innovation.

Salafists view scripture as God's last word; therefore, Muslims must implement it unflinchingly in this world. By contrast, other sects within Islam view scripture as a message from God requiring interpretation and understanding prior to their implementation in practice. Salafist scholars condemn local custom and the more mystical Muslim practices of such sects as the Sufis, since they purportedly undermine the Islamic identities of Muslims. This condemnation, known as *takfir*, is part of the doctrine of Salafi radicalism.²²

In the eighteenth century, Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab managed to turn Salafi doctrines into a political framework. Crucially, his pact with Muhammad Ibn Saud, the emir of Dar'iyyah in north-eastern Arabia, provided Salafist Wahhabism with the champion it needed for the establishment of a nineteenth-century Salafist theocracy. By the twentieth century, vast discoveries of oil lubricated the Saudi commitment to spreading Wahhabism around the world, from West Africa to Southeast Asia. Today, Salafist literalism and the ideological puritanism espoused by Wahhabism have been embraced by many Islamists, including al-Qaeda and ISIS.²³

The second major historical trend that has plagued the Muslim world by stifling political reform and driving violence has been Sunni and Shia sectarianism. The resurgence of sectarianism has gone hand in hand with the dominance of *Sharia* literalism. As is well known, one target of Salafist *takfiri* ideology has been the Shia sect, which denotes the earliest schism in the religious tradition. Modern sectarianism has also been fueled by geopolitical rivalry. Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran for years have exploited this sectarian division in their competition for leadership of the Islamic world. This sectarian contest plays out daily in the international headlines, but it is rooted in the political history of Islam.

Within a century of his death, Muhammed and his followers had built an empire that stretched from Spanish Europe to Central Asia. But a debate over succession split the early Muslims. The dominant group elected Abu Bakr, a companion of Muhammed, as the first caliph and sidelined the claims of another group that had proposed Ali ibn Abi Talib, Muhammed's cousin and son-in-law. The term Shia relates to *shi'atu Ali*, or the followers of Ali.

The caliphate migrated out of the Arabian Peninsula and across the modern Middle East, first to Damascus under the Umayyad dynasty, and later to Baghdad under the Abbasid dynasty. For centuries, Sunni rule mostly dominated the Muslim world, until the great Safavid dynasty in Persia (1501-1722) adopted Shia Islam as its religion of state. The Safavids battled the Ottoman caliphs for supremacy, broadly setting the geographic and political fault lines of today's Middle East: Shias are in the majority in Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan and Bahrain; meanwhile, Sunnis predominate in more than forty countries from

Salafists and Wahhabis judge the practices of Shia Muslims and their belief system as apostate. This has been reinforced by the ethnic divide between the Arab (Sunni) world and the Persian (Shiite) lands. Moreover, while sectarian dehumanizing rhetoric is centuries old, new technologies and social media have ratcheted up the scope and scale of the Salafist critique. Sunni Islamists have invoked harsh, historic denunciations such as *rafidha*, rejecters of the faith, and *majus*, Zoroastrian or crypto-Persian, to describe Shias. Meanwhile, Shia leaders from Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, to Iranian officials routinely describe their Sunni opponents as *takfiris* (code for al-Qaeda terrorists) and Wahhabis. In 2015, fundamentalists no longer have to infiltrate mainstream mosques to attract recruits surreptitiously; instead, with the click of a blog post, they can disseminate their call to *jihad*. Today, tens of thousands of organized sectarian militants capable of triggering large-scale conflict exist across the Middle East.

Despite the efforts of many Sunni and Shia clerics — such as Muhammad Abduh in Egypt, Muhammad Iqbal in British India (modern-day Pakistan), and Ali Shariati in Iran — to reduce tensions through dialogue and understanding, many experts express concern that Islam's major divide will lead to an escalation of violence. In the past, Sunni al-Qaeda and Shia Hezbollah may not have defined their movements in sectarian terms; instead, they traditionally have favored anti-imperialist, anti-Zionist, and anti-American frameworks to describe their *jihad* and its pan-Islamic purpose. However, over the past decade, both groups have shifted from a focus on the West and Israel to attacking other Muslims, such as al-Qaeda's killing of Shia civilians in Iraq and Hezbollah's participation in the Syrian civil war.

Today, as a descendant of al-Qaeda, ISIS is looking to unite the Muslim world and change the geographic boundaries of the Middle East before it turns its guns on the United States and Europe. ISIS believes that it must first weed out apostates and “fake” Muslims, a definition that covers anyone standing against it, including but not only Shias. Ordinary Muslims may not agree with ISIS' methods and its interpretation of the caliphate, but the notion of a caliphate — the historical political entity governed by Islamic law and tradition — is powerful even among more secular-minded Muslims, especially the Sunnis, as it invokes the historical and cultural memory of early, “pure” Islam.²⁵ The “idyllic” societies of Makkah and Medina continue to resonate in the religio-cultural memory of Muslims.

Toward a Critical-Progressive Jurisprudence

The greatest victims of the violence and social upheaval and backwardness caused by *Sharia* literalism and sectarian division have been Muslims. If they are to escape their fate, it is imperative that the Muslim world cultivates reformers at ease with modernity and its institutions.²⁶ Across the centuries, such reformers and free thinkers — like the Mu'tazilites — have periodically surfaced, even though their voices have frequently been ignored and marginalized.²⁷

In the South Asian context, perhaps the greatest champion of a modernist approach to jurisprudence was the Indian poet and thinker Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938).²⁸

According to Iqbal, the traditional aversion to legal innovation in Islam has been due to conservative fears of social fragmentation made worse by Islamic rationalism. This fear has caused Muslim conservatives to resort to an increasingly systematic and puritanical understanding of *Sharia*. By rejecting the use of reason to interpret *Sharia* according to changing contexts, Iqbal argued that the “unthinking masses” were left by Muslim elites in the “hands of intellectual mediocrities” and that this compelled them to adhere “blindly” to the most dominant schools of jurisprudence.²⁹ Iqbal argued that Muslims needed to be freed from the grip of primitive theologians and jurists. “The whole community,” he wrote, “needs a complete overhauling of its present mentality in order that it may again become capable of feeling the urge of fresh desires and ideals.”³⁰ According to Iqbal, the Quran was meant “to awaken in man the higher consciousness of his relation with God and the universe” and to lay out general legal principles and rules for human conduct (in particular, with respect to family life).³¹ Since a prophet’s teachings relate to the “habits, ways, and peculiarities of the people to whom he is specifically sent,” the best approach to politics is to select groups of people as a central nucleus for instituting a consensus-based “universal *Sharia*.”³² In other words, Islam’s laws and practices must reflect its universality and remain in harmony with the times by carrying forward the principle of evolutionary thought within the Quran. As a result, for Iqbal, “the teaching of the Quran that life is a process of progressive creation necessitates that each generation, guided but un- hampered by the work of its predecessors, should be permitted to solve its own problems.”³³

Iqbal’s teachings were based on the Islamic principle of *ijma*, or consensus, which constitutes a major source of Quranic jurisprudence. Iqbal argued that historically this principle of consensus never took on institutional form, as it would have undermined the imperial authority of the caliphs. With the emergence of nationalistic Muslim republics and the establishment of legislative institutions in Islamic countries, Iqbal argued that the time had come for the revival of *ijma* as a principle for modern Muslim politics.

Moreover, in Iqbal’s worldview, the Quran affirms both the undeniably eternal and the vibrantly temporal; within the “structure of Islam,” *ihad*, or independent reasoning, is the way of change.³⁴ *Ijtihad* can be undertaken “with a view to form an independent judgment on a legal question” that is grounded in both the Quran and the Hadith.³⁵ In the beginning, the spread of Islam and the establishment of Muslim political order necessitated “systematic legal thought” and “early doctors of law,” manifested through various schools of Islamic jurisprudence. By the early twentieth century, however, Iqbal wondered whether within Islamic law there were prospects for a “fresh interpretation of its principles,” since it is not inherently “stationary and incapable of development.”³⁶

Iqbal’s ideas have had a major impact across the Islamic world; his work is cited wherever there is a movement for reforming legal edicts. It is a pity that Pakistan, which has often claimed and celebrated him, is currently under the stranglehold of radical clerics and state-sponsored jihadism. His ideas to date remain the ideal for seeking Islamic reformation in a democratic context and are an inspiration for modernist reformers in South Asia.

In addition to Iqbal, the influential Iranian scholar Ali Shariati (1933-1977) also emphasized that Islam needed an enlightenment movement to guide people and bring new dynamism to the faith. Shariati’s view was that an “Islamic Protestantism” was required for

the religion's advancement and progress in its legal thought. Islamic Protestantism would enable the religion to shed the degenerating factors that had stultified its thinking.³⁷ Shariati held that the religious messages offered by formal and traditional religious institutions were outdated. He maintained that the "relationship between (the clergy) and the people should be like the relationship between teacher and pupil — not between leader and follower, not between icon and imitator; the people are not monkeys who merely imitate."³⁸ His ideas inspired the Iranian revolution, but the theocrats appropriated his ideas for their own purposes. Shariati's essential message of liberating Islam from clerics and outdated forms of thought through reason was quite ironically bypassed and subverted.

The nineteenth-century Egyptian reformer Muhammad Abduh also argued that Muslims had to challenge the interpretations of divine texts provided by medieval clerics and that reason had to be applied to re-interpret earlier edicts. Abduh argued that Islam shunned the slavish imitation of tradition and showed that independent thought was an essential precondition for the evolution of Muslim society and adherence to true Islamic principles. Albert Hourani, a scholar of liberal Arab thought, writes, "Abduh was convinced that the Muslim nations could not become strong and prosperous again until they acquired from Europe the sciences which were the product of its activity of mind, and they could do this without abandoning Islam, for Islam taught the acceptance of all the products of reason."³⁹ Similar to liberation theologians in the Christian world, he stressed that Islam rightly understood could free human beings from manmade enslavement and ensure equal rights for all, if only the monopoly on clerical exegesis were eliminated. Unsurprisingly, Abduh was branded an infidel by the traditionalists.

Over the last two decades, globalization has contributed to the establishment and increased activity of transnational Muslim networks that support reform of the *Sharia*. These networks have substantially advanced more inclusive, pluralistic, and vibrant civil societies that reject false essentialisms and the inherited identities of the past. Thanks in part to these networks, it is becoming more difficult for the forces of radicalism to marginalize and suppress pious and freethinking modern Muslims who are seeking reform for the good of their societies.

Thus, while the champions of Islamist literalism and sectarianism have become dominant in many societies, new opportunities have begun to emerge for Muslims who are seeking modern reform in *Sharia*. It is widely believed that political struggles in the Muslim world have divided Muslim scholars into two camps: modern secularists and backward Islamists. This is a false dichotomy, and as the Malay scholar Adis Duderija notes, a third block has emerged in recent times that advances critical-progressive Muslim thought and rejects both the uncritical emulation of the West and Islamist fundamentalism.⁴⁰ This stream of thought focuses on re-interpreting normative Quranic teachings in line with the global outlook and in a manner that advances the well-being of peoples in accordance with their particular context.⁴¹

Specifically, Duderija argues that critical-progressive scholar-activists contest "both (1) 'fundamentalist' Muslim hegemonic discourses on issues related to modernity, human rights, gender, justice, and democracy, and (2) mainstream Western socio-political and legal theories, and certain secular Enlightenment assumptions."⁴² Their focus instead is on empowering the individual, including Muslim women, and on maximizing the engagement and participation of the individual in Muslim religious and political life.

Scholars and activists belonging to this broad-based tendency in contemporary Islam are developing new concepts and paradigms in both domestic and international politics. The adherents of critical- progressive Muslim thought are based in both Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority nations. These thinkers and activists strive to remain faithful to Islam by freeing modern Muslim from the language, ideas, theoretical concepts, and sources of the late-medieval Muslim traditions. For example, in his new book, *Reasoning with God — Reclaiming Shari'ah in the Modern Age*, UCLA Professor Khaled Abou El Fadl argues that Sharia is more like an evolving common law than a set of defined precepts and commandments. Fadl maintains that the early Islamic jurists, such as Imam al-Shafi'i (767-820 CE), changed their rulings for different contexts:

Contemporary fundamentalist and essentialistic orientations imagine Islamic law to be highly deterministic and casuistic, but this is in sharp contrast to the epistemology and institution of the Islamic legal tradition that supported the existence of multiple equally orthodox and authoritative legal schools of thought, all of which are valid representations of the divine will.⁴³

A number of other critical-progressive thinkers have argued for a similar approach to Islamic tradition. These scholars range from Amina Wadud and Omid Safi in the United States to Farid Esack in South Africa, Hasan Hanafi in Egypt, Ali Ashgar Engineer in India, Enes Karic in Bosnia, F. A. Noor in Malaysia, and the late Nurcholish Majid in Indonesia.⁴⁴

Many of these thinkers acknowledge that the early Muslim modernists ultimately failed to find mainstream acceptance. They observe that since early Islamic modernism did not advance a systematic methodology for interpreting the Sharia, it has proven unsuccessful in displacing the prevalent pre-modern ontology of traditional Islam. Instead, early modernist Muslim thought became a scattered attempt of cultural revival motivated by the hardships of the colonial era and its sociopolitical, economic, and cultural aftershocks. The new generation of critical-progressive reformers seeks to avoid this. They consider the contributions of medieval-era scholars in an attempt to advance understanding between Islamic and Western values, thus putting forward a more systematic and integrated framework for understanding modernity and for advancing urgently needed reform.

Feminist Voices

The critical-progressive tendency in Islamic thought is characterized by its dedication to social justice, gender equality, religious non-discrimination, and a belief in the inherent dignity of every human being as a carrier of God's creation or image. These principles comprise the worldview of the Quran. Another distinguishing characteristic for critical-progressives is spirituality and the nurturing of interpersonal relationships based on

Sufi moral philosophy, known as Muslim humanism. The tendency also makes use of modern social thought to comprehend how contexts have changed and how *Sharia* can be up- dated accordingly in line with Islamic principles. One prominent voice of this tradition is the director of Duke University's Islamic Studies Center, Omid Safi, who holds that critical-progressive analysis should take into account the politico-economic and social dynamics shaping the North-South divide in the world.⁴⁵

As a whole, critical-progressive theorists reject such binaries as tradition vs. modernity, secularism vs. religion, and the West vs. Islam. For them, historical "progress" is not viewed as linear; these scholars may seek to learn from the analysis of Western experience, but they don't argue for the application of foreign models that wouldn't work in Muslim societies. Instead, their focus is on the realization of possible religious and political change within a particular cultural context.

While this approach to reform is fresh and promising, it has yet to translate into workable models of governance and institution building in Muslim societies. It has, however, laid out important intellectual contributions to address the contemporary challenges in the Muslim world and provided a path to tackle the ideological quagmire that it faces.

Muslim women struggle every day against the patriarchal edicts and norms constructed by clerics ages ago that Islamists are now seeking to reinforce in society. But new thinkers are challenging this. Amina Wadud is an example of a Muslim scholar who has subtly advocated for Islamic equality and justice.⁴⁶ In her first book, *Quran and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, Wadud addresses the tensions in certain Quranic passages pertaining to justice and its myriad interpretations. She has put forward a comprehensive Quranic concept of gender equality that ranges from family and society to the entire Muslim Ummah. In her view, patriarchy is fundamentally un-Islamic.

Wadud inquires whether the Quran itself endorsed gender in- equality; utilizing the hermeneutics of *tawhid* (the unity of God), she establishes that it did not. God is above human beings, who were born as equals in the form of men and women. Thus, one person viewing oneself as superior to another, as in patriarchy, is like equating oneself with God while defying the principle of *tawhid*.⁴⁷ Wadud highlights the Quranic conception of *khilafa* (trustee), whereby God created *insaan* (human) without any gender discrimination. Every human being should be considered a trustee on earth.

Wadud also contends that the higher concepts revealed within the Quranic text supersede historical interpretations.⁴⁸ As an example, she cites the verse (4:3) allowing a man to marry up to four wives. For Wadud, this verse has to be situated in the particular context in which it was revealed, that is, of seventh century Arabia, when polygamy was commonplace. She argues that the Quran teaches that taking ad- ditional wives is directly contingent upon the non-discriminatory and fair treatment of all wives. Since this is not possible, she argues that the Quranic ideal remains monogamy and hence gender equality among spouses.

Perhaps the most poignant example of Wadud's critical interpretation applies to the Quranic verse that seemingly approves wife beating. Wadud and other scholars utilize a linguistic analysis to iden- tify multiple classical Arabic meanings that are no longer in use today. For example, the term *daraba* has been taken as an endorsement of beating/striking, but it could also mean, "to leave" in the sense of strik- ing out (on a journey, etc.).⁴⁹ Through

this, Wadud advances a Quranic view of gender equality.

In her 2005 book, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, Wadud stressed the importance of seeing the Quran not simply as a fixed text but “as an utterance or text in process.” In her view, one “important aspect of this challenge confronts the possibility of refuting the text, to talk back, to even say ‘no.’”⁵⁰ Wadud added that some divine revelations pertaining to certain practices common in the seventh century are bounded by time. One such example is slavery, which was “condoned and regulated but became unacceptable in modern times, was declared as such and has since been eliminated.”⁵¹ In sum, Wadud argues that while Islamic texts provide the key spiritual and intellectual framework, their literal application is limiting and needs to be contextualized.⁵²

Riffat Hasan, a Pakistani scholar based in the United States, has also been arguing for the use of rationality in addressing women’s rights in Islamic discourse.⁵³ As she puts it, “Not only does the Quran emphasize that righteousness is identical in the case of men and women, but it affirms, clearly and consistently, women’s equality with men and their fundamental right to actualize the human potential that they share equally with men.”⁵⁴ In this way, Hassan states that the Quran goes beyond egalitarianism as it displays special consideration for women and disadvantaged groups in society.⁵⁵

In contemporary times, despite the pressure of anti-women laws which have been instituted under the garb of “Islamization” in several Muslim countries, educated women are gradually realizing that religion is being used as a tool of oppression instead of as a path toward greater rights and freedoms. Hassan contends that “God, who speaks through the Quran, is characterized by justice, and it is stated clearly in the Quran that God can never be guilty of *zulm* (unfairness, tyranny, oppression, or wrongdoing).”⁵⁶ Thus the Quran cannot be treated as the source of human injustice, and the discrimination to which Muslim women have been subjected cannot be viewed as God-ordained. The goal of the Quran is to usher in peace, which can only exist within a just environment.

In Hassan’s view, “feminist theology” is needed within the framework of the Islamic belief system to “to liberate not only Muslim women, but also Muslim men, from unjust social structures and systems of thought which make a peer relationship between men and women impossible.”⁵⁷ Hassan joins those arguing that discriminatory laws enacted in the name of Islam “cannot be overturned by means of political action alone, but through the use of better religious arguments.”⁵⁸ A recent example of such a modernist interpretation is Morocco, where women’s activism has led to a comprehensive revision of Islamic law related to family matters. A new *Sharia* more compatible with the imperatives of the twenty-first century has been designed and established.⁵⁹

Challenging Jihadism

The modern Pakistani scholar Javed Ahmad Ghamidi has opined that the avenue for *ijtihad* is open.⁶⁰ It is the duty of religious scholars to undertake *ijtihad* and explore new meanings of Quranic verses according to changing times. This is in line with Iqbal’s view that the revision of old opinions has opened new vistas of progress throughout history. The principles established by earlier jurists based on the Quran and the Hadith need to be revisited by modern jurists rewriting Muslim laws based on religious principles in line

with the modern world.

The more pertinent ideas of Ghamidi relate to *jihad*.⁶¹ He argues that individuals, or groups of individuals, have not been given permission to declare war; only a legitimate state with organized political power and authority can do so. While living in Makkah, even Muhammad and his companions were not permitted to wage war. But after migration to Medina, they organized a political system that permitted warfare in self-defense. The *fitna*, or disruptive behavior, mentioned in the Quran is understood to be any violent effort that disturbs the social harmony and dissuades or pressures Muslims away from religion. Some even call it the “persecution” of Muslims.

In Ghamidi’s view, *jihad* actually means to put all your effort and resources toward achieving a particular goal. Similarly, in order to wage war for Islam, fighting nonbelievers, oppression, and injustice is allowed only under certain conditions. The prophets and their companions could only wage war for the faith; after them, no Muslim has been eligible to pursue this because they are not God’s messengers. Ghamidi also maintains that the Quran does not order capital punishment for apostasy. The death penalty is only applicable in the case of murder or when social harmony is disturbed. Moreover, for Ghamidi, nonbelievers who perform good deeds and believe in God will be rewarded on the Day of Judgment. Relations between Muslims and non-Muslims are permitted, and Muslim states may interact with non-Muslim states in accordance with their shared interests.

There are many others calling for the rejection of narrow jihadist interpretations, including the compelling Pakistani reformist scholar Tahir ul Qadri, who authored a *fatwa* (legal edict) against terrorism and suicide bombings.⁶² Qadri stresses that the indiscriminate killing of Muslims is unlawful and that Islam does not sanction acts of terrorism against non-Muslims. His work uses traditional sources and has helped advance the scope of *Sharia* as a living interpretation of Islamic edicts derived from the scripture. In short, the *fatwa* bans suicide bombing “without any excuses, any pretexts, or exceptions.”⁶³ As ISIS forces started to capture territories with brutal violence, more than 120 Muslim scholars from around the globe issued an open letter against its narrative and rebutted its interpretation of Islamic teachings.⁶⁴ However, this viewpoint has limited popular traction in the Middle East and the rest of the Muslim world, mainly due to ISIS’ effective propaganda claim that it represents the original Islam and is opposed to Western diktat.

Is Reformation Possible?

In a recent essay, the Turkish writer Mustafa Akyol noted the example of the English philosopher John Locke, whose ideas brought liberalism to Christianity. Locke did not attack religion and derived his case for political and religious freedom from “both reason and the Bible.”⁶⁵ Akyol argues for a “Lockean leap,” citing the late seventh century school of theologians called the Murjites, or postponers, who applied reason. They interpreted the faith in times of deep division amidst violence perpetrated by an extremist group called the Kharijites, or dissenters, who viewed other Muslims as apostates fit for death. Murjites held that no “Muslim had the right to judge others on matters of faith; only God had that ultimate authority. Thus, they reasoned, all doctrinal disputes should be postponed to the

afterlife, to be resolved by God.”⁶⁶

The same religious humility guided by dedication to the eternal and by reason is urgently needed to address the contemporary emergency in the Muslim world. Many mainstream theologians have indeed shown how this is possible. The works of such scholars as Muhammad Tahir-ul Qadri in Pakistan, Fethullah Gulen in Turkey, and Habib Ali al-Jifri in Yemen require wider dissemination, especially in the Arab world and Africa, where violent Islamists are carrying out their agendas.⁶⁷ In Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, the voice of Salman al-Awdah, who is preaching nonviolence despite his Salafi credentials, needs to resonate and merge with other reformist movements. Al-Awdah furthermore has taken a public position that a theocracy is not “Islamic” and a “democracy proves to be better than autocracy.”⁶⁸

Perhaps one key obstacle for a full-scale reformation is that the Muslim world today lacks a unified, central religious authority capable of undertaking such a large-scale effort. This is most true for the dominant Sunni variant of Islam. Shiite Islam and its many sub-sects have something more approximate to centralized authority. Meantime, addressing the emergency within Sunni Islam will depend foremost on the advance of civil society and getting beyond the ideological quagmire that Muslim religious and political thought faces.

Al-Qaeda, its affiliates, and ISIS have killed more Muslims than non-Muslims. This is an important message that still needs to be reinforced within the Muslim world. Moreover, a critical approach would show how popular animosity toward the West actually exacerbates the emergency by fueling Islamism’s appeal and simultaneously stifling alternative thinking about reform. In this, the invocation of reason and rationality as a basis of Islamic revival may have a promising future. However, this new thinking cannot achieve mainstream liftoff until a critical mass of Muslims addresses the ideological quagmire they’re facing and reject, re-interpret, and modernize traditional decrees and edicts. Today, there are small but important efforts to develop alternatives to and challenge Islamism from within the Muslim societies.⁶⁹ It is incumbent on thinking Muslims to bend the course of Muslim history in a more positive and peaceful direction.

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Being Muslim Today — notes

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¹ The famous coinage by the former U.S. President George W. Bush in his State of the Union Address on January 29, 2002. Bush was referring to governments that he accused of abetting terrorism and two of the three governments accused were those of Muslim states.

² This section draws on a feature by the author entitled Insider's Indonesia published in weekly *The Friday Times*, May 18-24, 2007, Lahore, Pakistan.

³ Niels Mulder, *Mysticism in Java: Ideology in Indonesia*, Indonesia: Kanisius, 2005.

⁴ The Mu'tazilites advocated a theology that aimed at locating Islamic creedal system in reason. For further detail see J. V. Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*. USA: Harvard University Press, 2006.

⁵ Farzana Hassan, *Remembering Allama Iqbal's Message to Muslims*, available at <http://www.farzanahassan.com/Articals/Iqbal.htm>.

⁶ Muhammad Iqbal, "The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam," in *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, available at <http://www.allamaiqbal.com/works/prose/english/reconstruction/>.

⁷ Suroosh Irfan, "Rumi, Iqbal and 'Dynamic Sufism,'" *Daily Times*, April 21, 2007.

⁸ Raza Rumi, "Radical Message," *The News on Sunday*, February 3, 2008.

⁹ Abu Sa'id ibn Abi al-Hasan Yasar al-Basri (642-728) was a Muslim ascetic and a popular public figure of his times. Yasar al-Basri stressed religious self-examination, rejected determinism, and held that people are responsible for their actions.

¹⁰ Amal Hamada, *Paving the Way for a Revolution*, available at <http://www.islamonline.net>. For a detailed discussion of martyrdom, please see Ali Shariati, *Martyrdom, Arise and Bear Witness*, Chapter 1; available online at <http://www.shariati.com/>.

¹¹ Raza Rumi, "Marvels of Malaysia," *The Friday Times*, April 2006.

¹² Interview with Malaysian national news agency Bernama.com, March 19, 2006.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Jonathan Schanzer, "At War With Whom?" *Doublethink* (Spring 2002), available at <http://www.meforum.org/168/at-war-with-whom>; Quintan Wiktorowicz, "A Genealogy of Radical Islam," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 28 (2005), pp. 75–97, available at <http://insct.syr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Wicktorovitz.2005>.

¹⁶ Ziauddin Sardar, "Rethinking Islam," *Journal of Futures Studies*, Vol. 6, no. 4 (May 2002), pp. 117-124, available at <http://www.jfs.tku.edu.tw/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/064-A06.pdf>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Mohammad Arkoun, *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (London: al-Saqi Books, 2002), p. 13, as discussed in Sardar, "Rethinking Islam."

²¹ Ziauddin Sardar, "Islamic History Is Full of Free Thinkers," *The Independent*, January 21, 2015, available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/islamic-history-is-full-of-free-thinkers--but-recent-attempts-to-suppress-critical-thought-are-verging-on-the-absurd-9993777.html>.

²² Mark Woodward, et al., "Salafi Violence and Sufi Tolerance? Rethinking Conventional Wisdom," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 7, no. 6 (2013), available at <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/311/html>.

²³ Yousaf Butt, "How Saudi Wahhabism Is the Fountainhead of Islamist Terrorism," *Huffington Post*, January 20, 2015, available at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-yousaf-butt/saudi-wahhabism-islam-terrorism_b_6501916.html; Scott Atran, "The Emir," *Spotlight on Terror*, Vol. 3, no. 9 (December 16, 2005), available at http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=562&cHash=f0e77f13a0#.VOT9_fnF_aA.

²⁴ The Council on Foreign Relations, "The Sunni-Shia Divide," available at <http://www.cfr.org/peace-conflict-and-human-rights/sunni-shia-divide/p33176#!/>.

²⁵ Charles Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State," Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper, November 13, 2014, available at http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/11/profiling%20islamic%20state%20lister/en_web_lister.pdf; Stanford University, "Mapping Militant Organizations: The Islamic State," available at <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/1#ideology>.

²⁶ Unlike other Abrahamic faiths, Islam does not envision, let alone explicitly sanction, the institution of the clergy. There is no central authority defining what it means to be Muslim. Therefore, as the Pakistani scholar Fazlur Rahman argues, the Sunna and the Quran are "essentially an ever-expanding process." Moreover, the expansion of the Islamic faith across the globe has necessitated greater acceptance of plurality and diversity within Muslim thought and practice. Indeed, the earliest interpretations of Islam came about in political and cultural contexts that have little in common with today's world; therefore, these interpretations require revision and

reformulation in light of contemporary circumstances.

The challenge, as Sardar puts it, is to rediscover the “distinguished history of critical thinking in Islam.” This critical approach means questioning orthodoxy and demanding evidence. Islam does not divide Muslims into groups or categorize them; instead, it embraces diverse social and political groups. Today’s critical thinkers should continue to raise questions about all dominant interpretations of the religion as they search for answers to the challenges faced by Muslims across the world.

This critique is not purely Islam-centric, but also applies to Western political thought and its conception of the Muslim social world. It attempts to contextualize current problems in their historical and cultural backdrop to understand their origins and complexities. Such an approach brings with it major political and social opportunities, as the legacy of rational Muslim thinkers has become of paramount importance in dealing with the sectarian fault lines that destabilize the Muslim world today.

Re-focusing on the historical stream of thought that takes a critical eye to traditional interpretations can change our outlook toward Islam and also transform the narrative associated with the religion.

(For Rahm, see Fazlur Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1995), p. 15, available at http://ebooks.rahnuma.org/religion/Fazlur_Rehman/Fazlur_Rehman-Islamic-Methodology-in-History.pdf; for Sardar, see Ziauddin Sardar, “Critical Muslim,” *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, July 2013, available at <http://ziauddinsardar.com/2013/07/critical-muslim/>; Ziauddin Sardar, “Islamic history is full of free thinkers,” *The Independent*, January 21, 2015, available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/islamic-history-is-full-of-free-thinkers--but-recent-attempts-to-suppress-critical-thought-are-verging-on-the-absurd-9993777.html>.)

²⁷ The collapse of the Abbasid dynasty and its capital of Baghdad — then the intellectual and social crown jewel of Muslim civilization — produced fears of social breakup. In turn, conservatives have emphasized classical traditions and dismissed new ideas.

²⁸ Ironically, in 1947 Iqbal was declared the national poet of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

²⁹ Mohammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1930), p. 108, available at <http://wccftech.com/kursed/The%20Reconstruction%20of%20Religious%20Thought%20in%20Islam.pdf>.

³⁰ Hanif Lakadawala, “Muslim Intellectual Stagnation,” *Islamic Research Foundation International*, available at http://www.irfi.org/articles/articles_651_700/muslim_intellectual_stagnation.htm; Mohammad Iqbal, “Separate Muslim Nationhood in India” in *Muslim Political Thought: a Reconstruction*, ed. Fateh Mohammad Malik. (Islamabad: Alharm, 2002).

³¹ Mohammad Iqbal, "Separate Muslim Nationhood in India" in *Muslim Political Thought: a Reconstruction*, ed. Fateh Mohammad Malik. (Islamabad: Alharma, 2002), pp. 165-166.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 171-172.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

³⁴ Mohammad Iqbal, "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam" (1930), p. 106, available at <http://wccftech.com/kursed/The%20Reconstruction%20of%20Religious%20Thought%20in%20Islam.pdf>.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.178.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.168.

³⁷ Ali Shariati, "Where Shall We Begin?" available at http://www.iranchamber.com/personalities/ashariati/works/where_shall_we_begin.php#sthash.gZjnScAb.dpuf.

³⁸ Transcript of a speech given by Dr. Seyyed Hashem Aghajari on June 19, 2002, to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the death of Ali Shariati, available at [http:// ilrs.org/faith/aghajaritext.html](http://ilrs.org/faith/aghajaritext.html).

³⁹ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), available at http://books.google.com/books/about/Arabic_Thought_in_the_Liberal_Age_1798_1.html?id=Wto_ymT5vbQC.

⁴⁰ Adis Duderija, "Critical-Progressive Muslim Thought: Reflections on Its Political Ramifications," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, Vol. 11, no.3 (September 20, 2013), pp. 69-79, available at http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2328581.

⁴¹ Traditionally, Islamic religious discourse has sought to collapse the Western distinction between the "religious" (private) and "secular" (public) domains. Muslims have historically and hermeneutically considered the early era of Islam as sacred, akin to a "prophetic revelatory event." The Salafi School illustrates this trend, incorporating the medieval epistemology commonly found in writings on Muslim jurisprudence, including Dar al-Islam (Abode of Islam), Dar al-Kufr (Abode of Disbelief), and Dar al-Harb (Abode of War).

⁴² Adis Duderija, "Critical-Progressive Muslim Thought: Reflections on Its Political Ramifications," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, Vol. 11, no.3 (September 20, 2013), pp. 69-79, available at http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2328581.

⁴³ Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Reasoning with God: Reclaiming Shari'ah in the Modern Age* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), p. xxxix.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, ed. Omid Safi (London: One- world, 2003).

⁴⁶ Trisha Sertori, "Dr. Amina Wadud: For a Progressive Islam," *The Jakarta Post*, November 19, 2009, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/11/19/dr-amina-wadud-for-a-progressive-islam.html>.

⁴⁷ Margot Badran, "Re/placing Islamic Feminism," *Sciences Po*, 2010, available at http://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/sites/sciencespo.fr/ceri/files/ci_feminism_iran_mb.pdf.

⁴⁸ Amina Wadud, *Quran and Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 10.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁵⁰ Amina Wadud, *Inside Gender Jihad* (London: Oneworld, 2006) p. 191.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 192

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁵³ Liv Tonnessen, "Islamic Feminism," (Christian Michelsen Institute, University of Bergen, 2014), available at <http://www.cmi.no/publications/file/5289-islamic-feminism-a-public-lecture-by.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Qtd. in Åsne Halskau, "Between Tradition and Modernity: A Radical Muslim View on the Interpretation of Gender Roles in Islam," in *Women and Religion in the Middle East and Mediterranean*, eds. I.M. Okkenhaug and I. Mæhle (Oslo: Oslo Academic Press, March 2003), p. 105.

⁵⁵ Åsne Halskau, "Between Tradition and Modernity: A Radical Muslim View on the Interpretation of Gender Roles in Islam," in *Women and Religion in the Middle East and Mediterranean*, eds. I.M. Okkenhaug and I. Mæhle (Oslo: Oslo Academic Press, March 2003).

⁵⁶ Riffat Hassan, "Religious Conservatism," *Islamic Research Foundation International*, available at http://www.irfi.org/articles/articles_101_150/religious_conservatism.htm.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Ziauddin Sardar, "Reform is Islam's Best Kept Secret," *The Guardian*, August 31, 2005, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/sep/01/religion.uk1>.

⁶⁰ Mumtaz Ahmad, et al., "Who Speaks for Islam?" NBS Research Report #22, 2010, p.4, available at http://www.nps.edu/programs/ccs/Docs/Pubs/Religious_Figures_Afghanistan.pdf.

⁶¹ Javed Ghamidi, “Jihad o Qatal,” August 2009, available at <http://www.javedah-madghamidi.com/ishraq/view/Jihad-O-Qataa4>.

⁶² The fatwa is available at <http://www.minhajbooks.com/english/bookid/376/> Fatwa:-Suicide-Bombing-and-Terrorism-by-Shaykh-ul-Islam-Dr-Muhammad-Tahir-ul-Qadri.html.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ The letter is available at <http://www.lettertobaghdadi.com>.

⁶⁵ “Locke’s Political Philosophy,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, July 29, 2010, available at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/locke-political/>.

⁶⁶ Mustafa Akyol, “A Letter Concerning Muslim Toleration,” *New York Times*, February 17, 2015, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/18/opinion/mustafa-akyol-a-letter-concerning-muslim-toleration.html>.

⁶⁷ Ed Husain, “Countering al Qaeda’s Message,” *New York Times*, October 8, 2013, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/09/opinion/countering-al-qaedas-message.html>.

⁶⁸ Madawi Al-Rasheed, “Salman al-Awdah: In the Shadow of Revolutions,” *Jadaliyya*, April 27, 2013, available at http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/11412/salman-al-awdah_in-the-shadow-of-revolutions.

⁶⁹ For instance, groups like the Pakistan-based youth network Khudi are promoting messages that advocate for tolerance and challenge radicalism. In London, the Muslim organization Radical Middle Way holds public “question time” events with clerics from Egypt’s prestigious al-Azhar seminary, who cite scripture to support democracy in an Islamic context and undermine the view that suicide bombers are martyrs.

Religious Freedom and Pluralism

Jinnah's Pakistan Cannot Be Abandoned

This August (2013) has been cruel. Haunting images of Sindhi Hindus, essential to the cultural reality and demography of the province, leaving the country¹ shook those who believe that Pakistan belongs to all Pakistanis. This year's minorities' day — August 11 — inspired by the famous speech² of Pakistan's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, on a secular vision of Pakistan was dogged by the controversy of Hindu pilgrims departing for India, perhaps never to come back.

August 11, 1947, was the day when pragmatic leader Jinnah, the architect of a contested idea, "Pakistan," set a new and indiscriminately inclusive direction for the newly created state. His earlier references to the "Two Nation Theory" (of Hindus and Muslims being two distinct nationalities in British India), which had been employed as a political instrument to carve a separate country, required re-calibration and a governable definition. 1947 was not a straightforward or a linear event. It was a sum total of several accidents, failed negotiations, and the inability of the Indian National Congress and Muslim League to agree on a federal power-sharing formula.

The television footage of bullock carts carrying the belongings of Sindhi Hindus reminded one of the Partition's most heartwrenching scenes. Captured in black and white, those frozen moments of mass migration, denoting misery, uprootedness, and uncertainty, are all too familiar. For similar scenes to be re-enacted and televised in the information age are chilling; they indicate that the messy after-effects of the Partition continue to bedevil us even today.

It must have been a humid August day when Jinnah uttered these words, extempore, standing before the Constituent Assembly: "... and you will find that in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State."³ Sixty-five years later, Pakistan's Hindu community feels insecure and many reportedly want to leave the country. Have we betrayed Jinnah, our history, our future?

Jinnah believed that modern secular democracy was compatible with and inherent to Islamic teachings and that a federal, plural Pakistan could easily blend the two. But his successors defeated and defiled this vision, settling for a mighty postcolonial state reinvented for the native civil-military bureaucracy that despised the elected political elites. These elites also considered democracy ill-suited for Pakistan and Pakistanis and a federalist structure anathema for the centralized "nation-state." Almost all of these dilemmas continue to date, with the most worrying prospect being treatment of religious and ethnic minorities, which may continue to utterly baffle the course of inclusive democracy in Pakistan.

The only exception in recent times was Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, two-time former prime minister of Pakistan, who articulated a vision similar to that of the great "Quaid" Jinnah. Her last book, *Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy and the West*,⁴ argued that in several Muslim-majority countries, democracy failures were due to political rather than religious reasons, and in most cases "The West" played a problematic role. Yet Islam per se was not antithetical to a democratic system of governance. Is it surprising then that

Bhutto was brutally murdered in 2007 by extremists and their patrons?

The major exodus of Hindus from Pakistan took place around the Partition years (1947-48). In 1947, Hindus were nearly 16 percent of Pakistan's population. With the separation of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), the numbers declined further, and now Pakistani Hindus comprise 1.6 percent of the country's total population.⁵ In terms of numbers, however, they are still a large community; over 2.8 million Pakistanis are Hindu.⁶ According to the 1998 census, there were over 3 million Hindus living in Pakistan, with most residing in Karachi, Mirpur Khas, and Sukkur regions of Sindh.⁷

Pakistan's gradual evolution into a hybrid-theocratic state⁸ — with parts ruled under secular laws, parts ruled by traditional customs, and yet other parts under the yoke of one version of "Islamic law" or another — has been a tragic consequence of the nation-state using religion as the sole marker of its identity, especially during the Zia regime (1977-88), when a military dictator misused Islam and conservative elements of society so as to garner legitimacy to govern the country.

It all began in 1949 with the Objectives Resolution that declared the character of the state as Islamic without defining which Islam was it referring to.⁹ This becomes problematic considering that there are more than 73 sects or variants of the religion itself, some of which consider the others as non-Muslims.¹⁰ The continuous adventures of the security establishment and Pakistan's frontline status in fighting the Soviet Union during the 1980s, through *jihad* or holy war, led to one particular version of Islamic jurisprudence guiding changes in the Constitution, laws, and cultural mores. The Arabization and Wahabbization of Pakistan since the 1970s, in the wake of the Bhutto and Zia-led waves of Islamization, have created generations of young Pakistanis believing in a monolithic Sunni state as the equivalent of an Islamic Republic.¹¹ Thus constitutional freedoms and guarantees to minorities are now subject to cultural onslaught via the education system, ascendant seminaries, and media, which regurgitate this regressive and exclusionary worldview day in, day out. Riddled in these pursuits, the Islamic Republic has turned blind to the diversity within Islam.

It was no mistake when the former chief justice of the Lahore High Court, Khwaja Muhammad Sharif, reportedly commented in 2010 that "Hindus" were responsible for terrorism in Pakistan.¹² Later, the Court staff clarified that the judge meant Indians, but the deep identity of a "Muslim" Pakistan and "Hindu" India hides all the diversity in the two countries, where millions are trapped between such Kafkaesque visions of nation-states. On different occasions, our judges have also expressed their outrage at the idea of Pakistan going "secular." According to the *DAWN* newspaper, the present chief justice rhetorically asked the following question during court proceedings: "Should we accept if tomorrow parliament declares secularism, and not Islam, as the state polity?" In its astute commentary, the news- paper published the following in its editorial:

...Secularism is not *ladeeniat*¹³ — it is not anti-religion, as has been the claim of religious conservatives since the 1960s. It is one thing for Islamic parties to make that deliberately false claim, quite another for it to have apparently gained traction in the highest

court of the land. Secularism is a very specific and narrow concept of the separation of religion and the state. Rather than being anti-religion, secularism is religion neutral. Standing in the way of those claiming that secularism is anti-religion and even vaguely anti-Pakistan at some level is one giant, Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The speech that the Quaid made from the floor of the constituent assembly in 1947 was a clarion defense of secularism, notable both for the occasion and the powerful oratory... Perhaps the Supreme Court should ponder this question: Would a constitutional amendment passed on the basis of the Quaid's speech be declared against the "basic structure" of the constitution?¹⁴

Such is the state of affairs that today Hindus are worried about their physical security and cultural space.¹⁵ Pakistan's Hindu Council mobilizes rallies for rights but out of fear is quick to pledge undying loyalty to the state of Pakistan. Amid this confusion and fear earlier this year, the former (acting) chief justice of Pakistan, Rana Bhagwan Das, made the following remarks:

Article 25 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan speaks about the equality of all citizens, whereas article 36 provides for the promotion and protection of right and interests of minorities, including their due representation in the legislature. However, under article 41 (2) and 3rd schedule¹⁶ to the Constitution, minority groups are not allowed to hold certain public offices such as the president and the prime minister, which is a manifestation of discrimination....¹⁷

Justice Das has also advocated electoral reforms and the need to increase the representation. The current government has tabled a bill¹⁸ that seeks to increase the number of non-Muslim seats in the Parliament — but that may be just one of the many, many reforms needed. Reaching a point where even a conservative (former) functionary of the state had to complain about the level of discrimination and say that Hindus are perceived as "second-class citizens" speaks volumes of where we stand today. The good judge also pointed out the insertion of Article 2-A¹⁹ in our Constitution: "The narrative of the Constitution and legal discrimination in the name of religion through articles 2 (Islam as the state religion), 2-A and article 41²⁰ (stating that only a Muslim can head the state) of the Constitution renders the

minorities less preferred citizens....”²¹ It is ironic that a constitutional provision — Article 2A — inserted by a military dictator remains in operation and is leading the juridical debates in courtrooms. Legal arguments now cite Article 2-A more often than ever.

This year, 2013, has seen three disturbing trends. First, television anchors in their zeal to sell religion during Ramzan (Ramadan) undertook a live conversion of a young Hindu man.²² This was a distressful display of insecurity that grips the public mind about the conspiracies against Islam and Pakistan. That a country with 97 percent Muslims had to convert one more was nothing but the pursuit of a totalitarian vision articulated by extremists. And there is no legislation banning forced conversion in the country.

Second, the cases of Rinkle Kumari²³ and now Manisha,²⁴ who converted to Islam apparently out of choice to marry Muslim men, became communal and legal battles. Their situations are still shrouded in mystery, and such is the hold of clerics that every individual case turns into a battle for Islam. Human rights activist Marvi Sirmed, writing on Rinkle’s case, pertinently noted:

The question arises why in last six months, kidnapping of Hindu girls, forced conversions, and abduction of Hindu and Christian youngsters and saints is increased. “They want us to leave the country. They are forcing us to flee from our motherland. But we will not deter,” said Amar Lal, Rinkle’s counsel.²⁵

In the case of Rinkle Kumari, the role of the police, courts, and other law enforcement agencies was also not satisfactory. The otherwise activist Supreme Court had to factor in the might of the clerics and treaded carefully while pursuing the promise of “complete justice” enshrined in our Constitution. Sirmed put it bluntly:

Anger and disillusionment after the Supreme Court’s decision on the Rinkle Kumari case is not limited to her family. It seems to be shared by Sindhis in general and Sindhi Hindus in particular...it is not very difficult to see how the entire state structure in collusion with landed influential politicians, religious elite, and “independent” media swindled the process of justice.²⁶

Third, there has been an increase in radical outfits and movements in the Sufi-worshipping province of Sindh. For instance, reportedly in district Khairpur, 93 seminaries out of the total 117 are not registered with the government, and in the Umerkot district, where many Hindus reside; there are more than 400 *madrassas*.²⁷ Last year, a Hindu member of Sindh Assembly, Ram Singh Sodho, resigned from his seat and migrated to India after he received threats from militant groups. Yet all of this is not the case of extremism, as

kidnapping of Hindus for ransom is also the handiwork of criminal networks, which operate independently of militant organizations.²⁸ A recent story in an Indian magazine looks at how the Pakistani Hindus “are crossing over in ever larger numbers” and refuse to leave India even when their visas expire. “They prefer the life of illegal migrants with intermittent employment, and say that it is better than the discrimination and violence they face in their home country.”²⁹

Who are abandoned, condemned, forced to
immigrate & forced to survive heartbroken
Some day even the goddess of time will have
some pity on us!

May this happen I would ask to exactly this
“Have you been forced to immigrate?”

— Halina³⁰

These trends are inimical to the Sindhi cultural landscape, which has historically been a bastion of pluralism and syncretic belief systems. At the same time, much of Sindh remains a poor province mired by iniquitous land relations, absence of social services, and marginalization. It is not just the Sindhi Hindus who are bearing the brunt of poverty and exclusion; the landless *haaris* (peasants), the tenants on farms, and the very existence of bonded labor haunt the idea of an independent and equitable Pakistan. In Sindh alone, according to the Pakistan Institute of Labor Education and Research, two million households own no land; and 26 percent of 700,000 households possess the lowest share in land. Furthermore, over 80 percent of rural workers do not own homes and live on farms without the right to shelter.³¹ The plight of rural Sindhis (including Hindus) therefore is driven not only by increasing religious intolerance, but by their status as poor farm workers or tenants trapped in a system that refuses to change. This is another defeat of Jinnah’s vision:

...if we want to make this great State of
Pakistan happy and prosperous, we should
wholly and solely concentrate on the well-
being of the people, and especially of the
masses and the poor.

Sadly, too much emphasis has been laid on independence from the Hindu majority in 1947, overlooking the essential fact: independence from extractive, exploitative colonial rule. The agenda of social transformation remains pending, as the judiciary has reversed the modest land reform of the 1970s (comprising landholding ceilings determined by the Land Reforms Regulation, 1972, and Land Reforms Ordinance, 1977) by deeming them un-Islamic — applying a narrow interpretation of theology on private property.³²

Pakistani Muslims and their diversity are under attack by armed militias aiming to purify the land. Thus Pakistani “minorities” are no longer only non-Muslim. The Shias, Ahmadis,³³ and Hazaras³⁴ are all suffering and physically endangered³⁵ due to the grand departure from the type of Pakistani state envisaged on August 11, 1947. Instead of a neutral

arbiter of citizen interest, the state is partisan and often complicit in persecution of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Keeping the business of the state focused on welfare independent of religion, sect, ethnicity, and other such differentiations of “creed” has been abandoned with tragic consequences.

Tragically, Jinnah’s words are still strikingly relevant today: “I shall always be guided by the principles of justice and fair play without any, as is put in the political language, prejudice or ill-will, in other words, partiality or favoritism. My guiding principle will be justice and complete impartiality, and I am sure that with your support and cooperation, I can look forward to Pakistan becoming one of the greatest nations of the world.”

Pakistan has to make some existential decisions. Its survival now depends on whether its state wants to revert to what Jinnah had outlined in terms of justice, equity, and retaining the inherent pluralism of Pakistan.

A tolerant Pakistan, at peace with its neighbors, is vital to achieve progress and ensure the security of its diverse citizenry, especially the poor and the marginalized.

There is no other option.

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The Rise of Violent Sectarianism

Denominational differences are not new to Islam, just as they are not to other religions. However, the history of sectarian violence in Pakistan is a phenomenon that, while drawing on old differences of faith, has unfolded in a modern context. The recent rise in sectarian killings, for instance, is a continuation of the trends already gathering pace in Pakistani society from the 1980s. They indicate the growing retreat or failure of state and law enforcement agencies against the expanding power of militant groups that deploy guerrilla tactics to achieve their goals. Sectarianism in its contemporary manifestation, therefore, cannot be unlinked from the larger growth of Pakistan-based terror groups and their alliance with the global jihadist project negotiated by the loose conglomerate known as Al Qaeda.³⁶

The rise of global militant Islamism is a subject that has been researched extensively from various angles and is a bitterly contested narrative among various ideological positions (Byman 2003; Burke 2004; Moghadam 2008).

For several interconnected reasons, Pakistan has been labeled the “epicenter” of global terrorism, while the popular, corporate media has bestowed on it the uncharitable title of the “world’s most dangerous place.”

Three developments are most worrying for Pakistan. First, the widespread acceptance of Al Qaeda’s anti-West stance has permeated large swathes of the population (Khaled Ahmed 2010). Second, the U.S. policy of targeting Al Qaeda and its affiliates through drone strikes has forced its leaders to spread out and find new operational bases within urban Pakistan. Karachi, for instance, has been cited as a major ground for the continuation of its operations, in addition to Faisalabad, Lahore, and other areas.³⁷ Third, and most dangerously, in the past decade, Al Qaeda may have entered into an alliance with homegrown militants such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)³⁸ and sectarian outfits such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and Jaish-e Mohammad (Chisthi 2010).³⁹

The Roots of Modern Sectarianism

Sectarian conflict in Pakistan traces its roots to the Pakistani state's attempts to forge a national identity based on Islam. Muslim nationalism in India at the start of the Pakistan movement was broadly pan-Islamic in nature and aloof to sectarianism (Ahmed 2010). However, as early as the 1950s when new textbooks were commissioned for junior classes, the official narrative began to shift. The Pakistani state, as a matter of policy, decided to formulate a coherent national identity for the diverse territories that formed the federation of Pakistan. This virile new identity was based as much on constructs of Pakistan's Islamic identity as it was on a virulent anti-Indianism. It is from this ideological trajectory of the Pakistani identity that "an unspoken negative evaluation of Shiaism" emerged (Ahmed 2011). In making public education the site for building a non-inclusive identity, the state privileged the history and teachings of a number of religious person-ages, including Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb and Shah Waliullah, who abhorred Shiaism. Decrees of apostasy against the Shias of Pakistan in the 1990s would refer to the works of these religious figures as justification.

In addition to the emphasis on a singular Muslim identity that excluded the Shias, the 1974 constitutional amendment stoked fresh fires of sectarianism by launching apostasy verdicts against the Ahmadi community of Pakistan. According to this constitutional amendment, "a person who does not believe in the absolute and unqualified finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH) as the last of the prophets or claims to be Prophet, in any sense of the word or of any description whatsoever, after Muhammad (PBUH), or recognizes such a claimant as a Prophet or a religious reformer, is not a Muslim for the purposes of the constitution or law" (Ahmed 2011). The amendment did not explicitly mention the Ahmadi community and has been used by hardliner Sunni clerics to also target the Shia community in Pakistan. Apostasy fatwas relied on the phrase "a person who does not believe in the absolute and unqualified finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad" to give their judgment against the Shia (Ahmed 2011).

Sectarianism in Pakistan reached its pinnacle under the dictatorial regime of Zia ul Haq. In his eleven years in office (1977-88), Zia proceeded to impose a rigid interpretation of Islamic law on Pakistan, in part to legitimize his illegal rule and in part as a result of his own ideological inclinations. A gradual movement from the more tolerant, pluralist expression of Islam to a more austere and puritanical Deobandi Islam⁴⁰ had already begun in the country. Khaled Ahmed calls this phenomenon a movement from the "Low Church Islam," native to the unsettled plains of the Punjab and Sindh, to the "High Church Islam"⁴¹ of the seminaries of Northern India and Afghanistan (Ahmed 2011).

Towards "High Church" Islam

Once the nation's policy elite decided that Islam was to be the primary factor around which Pakistan's identity would be constructed, it was clear that the more rigid "High Church" Deobandi creed would dominate the ideological landscape of Pakistan,

with its influential seminaries in urban centers and its emphasis on laws and punishment. The “Low Church” Bareilvi clerics, who were tolerant of the rural shrine culture and of Shiaism, were gradually sidelined. However, it may be noted that the Bareilvi *ulema* (religious scholars), the “high priests” of the “Low Church,” were no strangers to exercising the sectarian, exclusionary approach to apostatize other creeds. A good example of this is Ahmed Raza Khan Bareilvi’s treatise, “Husam-ul-Hermayn,” in which he ended up apostatizing six Deobandi clerics of his time. Similarly, Bareilvis were known to have been in the vanguard to defend the controversial blasphemy laws and attack the Ahmadi community.⁴² Despite this, it’s fair to say that the popular expression of shrine Islam was definitely more tolerant of other creeds than that of the Deobandi seminary Islam.

The Deobandi creed was further strengthened with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the advent of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979. Afghanistan had always practiced the Deobandi variant of Fiqh Hanafia (Sunni jurisprudence), and the continual *jihad* project against the Soviet Union increased the charisma of the Deobandi seminary. In a conflation of Pak-Afghan fundamentalisms, all religious students, including those from the Bareilvi creed, were required to attend a Deobandi *madrassa* before they could enlist in the Afghan *jihad*, if the Afghans were to not consider them infidels (Ahmed 2011). The geopolitics of Shia-Sunni tensions in the Middle East after the Iranian revolution also added to the hardening of religious identities. At first, Zia tried to remain neutral between Iran and the Gulf Arab states, but a series of unpleasant meetings between him and Imam Khomeini changed that.

In Pakistan, the local Shia population mobilized in protest when Zia made the payment of *zakat*, the Islamic poor due, obligatory. All Muslims, regardless of their sectarian affiliation, were to pay the *zakat*,

2.5 percent of the value of their savings and assets, to the state. The Shias, who differed in their interpretation of the *zakat* edict, refused. The Shia community in Pakistan organized against the new law and staged one of the biggest protests in the country’s history, descending in large numbers on the capital (Ahmed 2011). Zia eventually had to announce an exemption for the community. The *zakat* law, specifically for the Sunni population of the country, further strengthened the hand of the “High Church” clergy in the country. King Faisal of Saudi Arabia was reported to have given seed money for Zia’s *zakat* fund on pre-condition that a part of the money would be donated to the Ahl-e-Hadith, an Islamic party closely allied with the puritanical Wahabbi movement of Saudi Arabia (Ahmed 2011). Following the imposition of the *zakat* law, the number of Deobandi *madrassas* shot up exponentially, from 401 in 1960 to 1745 in 1979. *Zakat* money was an important factor in this growth, though not the only one.⁴³

Letting the Monster Grow

Zia’s reaction to Iran’s hostility, coupled with the Shia opposition he faced within Pakistan, led to state impunity for the “anti-Shia stirrings among the Deobandi clergy in Pakistan” (Ahmed 2011:31). Evidence points to the fact that Zia was informed of the sectarian trouble brewing in the Jhang district of the Punjab but chose to ignore it. As a result, when the Anjuman Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (ASSP) institutionalized the politics of sectarian violence in 1985 in Jhang, announcing its mission as militancy against Shias, no

official censure ensued. To this day, the ASSP remains one of the most notoriously barbaric anti-Shia militant outfits in Pakistan (Ahmed 2011).

In 1986, a year later, a prominent Indian Muslim cleric funded by Saudi Arabia asked Deobandi *madrassas* in Pakistan to say whether the Shias were Muslim or not. The seminaries sent him *fatwas* that declared

the Shias non-Muslim. These *fatwas* later led to the death of many Shias in Pakistan. This, too, was ignored by the Zia government (Ahmed 2011). Also, in 1986, Zia allowed “a purge of Turi Shias” in the city of Parachinar, in the Kurram agency of the Tribal Areas.

Even after the advent of democracy in Pakistan in the 1990s, the sectarian situation in the country continued to worsen. Though formal state patronage was reduced for organizations like the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP, the new incarnation of ASSP), political support from a series of actors gave them the space and resources needed to grow. Candidates fielded by both large political parties were supported both overtly and covertly by the SSP during the 1990s (Abou Zahab 2006). SSP’s local clout in Jhang complicated the battle against sectarianism in Pakistan, and the governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif haplessly tolerated their growing sectarian militancy. During 1996-98, for instance, “sectarian violence had gripped the province with 204 terrorist attacks, killing 361 people. Lahore alone had shared the 64 attacks. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, a hardline splinter group of Sipah-e-Sahabah, and the Shia underground group Sipah-e-Muhammad were the major culprits behind these attacks” (Rana 2010).

When things became unmanageable, Nawaz Sharif, then prime minister, initiated a cleanup operation against the SSP but stopped when the SSP tried to assassinate him. Today Nawaz Sharif’s party, the PML-N, has been accused of forming an electoral alliance with sectarian elements in the Punjab.

In the past 30 years, many sectarian organizations have mushroomed in Pakistan, the most prominent of which are listed here:

In 1985, the Sipah-e-Sahaba (the army of the prophet’s companions) was founded in Jhang in the province of Punjab. It is currently active across the country. The Sipah-e-Sahaba is a Sunni militant organization founded by Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi. The SSP has carried out several terrorist attacks against the Shias in Pakistan, including the May 2004 attack on Shia worshippers in Karachi that killed 50 people. The SSP also operates as a political party and its members have been elected to the parliament of Pakistan. In January 2002, the organization was banned by General Musharraf. Following the ban, the SSP changed its name to Milat-e-Islamia Pakistan, but this was banned again in 2003.

The Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (the army of Jhangvi) is an offshoot of Sipah-e-Sahaba and operates in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. The LeJ has carried out many terrorist attacks against Shias and other minorities in Pakistan. The organization was banned in 2001 by General Musharraf and thereafter sought refuge in Afghanistan. After the collapse of the Taliban, LeJ members actively supported terrorist activities in Karachi, Peshawar, and Rawalpindi. The LeJ was involved in an attempt to assassinate former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his brother Shahbaz Sharif. The LeJ is also thought to have carried out attacks on Christians in Pakistan, including a grenade assault on the Protestant International Church in Islamabad on March 2002 that killed U.S. citizens. Intelligence reports have also linked the LeJ to Benazir Bhutto's assassination. The group is associated with Al Qaeda and TTP.

The Sipah-e-Muhammad (the army of Muhammad) is a Shia militant organization involved in sectarian terrorist activities in Pakistan, primarily in the Punjab province. The organization was founded by Mureed Abbas Yazdani in 1993 to train its young cadre to physically counter the militancy of Sunni groups like the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Sipah-e-Sahaba. The organization is known to have links with the Iranian regime and was banned by General Musharraf's government in 2002.

The Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqah Jafaria (the movement for the imposition of the Jafari Fiqh) is a Shia political party founded in 1979 following the Islamic revolution in Iran. The Tehrik aims to implement the Shia version of Islamic edicts on Pakistani Shias and protect them from being subjected to the Sunni version.

An offshoot of the Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqah Jafaria, Tehrik-e-Jafaria (the movement of the followers of Jafaria) was headed by Allama Arif Hussaini, who was assassinated during the Zia regime. Banned twice by General Musharraf, the TJP continues to operate in Pakistan under different names.

All of the groups mentioned above have been involved in sectarian violence since their inception and continue to wreak havoc in Pakistan today. A key reason for the increased violence has been the alliance between the local sectarian groups and the transnational networks such as Al Qaeda and the Taliban who found space in Pakistan after the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.

Why Al Qaeda Matters in Pakistan's Sectarian Battles

Al Qaeda is more of an ideology than an organization. *Qaeda*, an Arabic word, variously translated as a “base of operation” or “method,” has always been understood by the militants as the latter. In 1987, Abdullah Azzam, a radical Sunni Muslim ideologue, exhorted young men from across the Muslim world to fight the alleged oppression of the West. He termed his envisioned movement of Muslim warriors “Al Qaeda Al Sulbah” (a vanguard of the strong). It was the FBI that formally christened the loosely linked group of militants led by Osama bin Laden “Al Qaeda,” during its investigation of the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings in East Africa (Burke 2004a).

With the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Al Qaeda became active in the country and proactively inflamed sectarian tensions as a tactic. Civilian populations in Shia and Sunni neighborhoods were targeted to aggravate inter-sect relations (Evans 2009). Sacred pilgrimage sites frequented by the Shias, like the shrine of Imam Moussa al-Kazim in Baghdad, were also targeted (*Al Jazeera News* Dec 2010).

Al Qaeda continued to operate from the Pak-Afghan border despite the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, and its leadership found safe havens in Pakistan. Although over the years Bin Laden and his partners were successful in creating a structure in Afghanistan and Pakistan that attracted young recruits, it was never established as a cohesive terror network. Instead, Al Qaeda continues to operate like a “venture capital firm,” providing funding, contacts, and expert advice to militants from all over the Islamic world. In Pakistan, Al Qaeda is known to have links with the TTP and several other extremist groups.

Is Sectarianism Gaining Strength?

It is now widely recognized that sectarian killings are on the rise in contemporary Pakistan. Several research-based commentaries argue that sectarianism is growing in affiliation with Taliban franchises in Pakistan, which in turn are linked with Al Qaeda remnants.

For instance, Amir Rana, who heads The Pak Institute of Peace Studies, says:

Eleven major sectarian terrorist attacks have been reported in Punjab during the last five years (2005-2010). The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and its affiliate groups have claimed responsibility for these sectarian attacks. This trend reveals the close nexus between the Taliban and several major sectarian and militant groups in Punjab, which are now labeled as “Punjabi Taliban.” This alliance between the Taliban and sectarian outfits is now expanding its targets. The killing of Mufti Sarfaraz Naeemi was the first indication, and the horrific terrorist attack on Data Darbar is a manifestation of the expanding sectarian agenda.

Statistics point to a worrisome trend. Since September 2010, an average of three or four incidents of sectarian violence has taken place every month in the country. The number of attacks peaked during the time of Ashura (seven attacks in December 2010). The statistics also show a spike in the number of attacks in July of this year (2013), the same month the Hazara were brutally attacked in July. The spike can be indicative of a premeditated attack on Shia communities throughout the country by one of the several Sunni extremist organizations.

Data that isolates the number of sectarian attacks by location demonstrate that most sectarian attacks have taken place in Balochistan, followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the tribal areas. In Balochistan, this was largely characterized by targeted attacks against the Shiite Hazara community. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the violence is consistent with the increasing influence of local militias that style themselves “the Taliban” and are in some cases supported by both Al Qaeda and the TTP. Sectarian violence in the northern areas can be attributed to the pervasion of extremist Salafist ideology in the region, implemented by these armed groups. Statistics indicate that sectarianism is also still persistent, albeit to a lesser degree, in Sindh and Punjab. This tenacity confirms that sectarian outfits are still very much in business in the country. It also reflects continued government and state inability to erode their capacity.

Flashpoints for Violence

Parachinar: Sectarian tensions in the tribal city of Parachinar are centuries old. The situation worsened during the time of Zia ul Haq, when the Sunni Mujahideen, together with the local population, attempted to purge the city of its Turi Shia population. The Zia government aided the Mujahideen through its inaction (Ahmed 2011). Sectarian tensions flared up again following the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and the rapid Talibanization of the Pak-Afghan border region. In 2008, the local Sunni population sided with the Taliban and laid siege to an enclave of Shiites in the city. The resulting fighting forced Shia residents to flee and seek refuge in the city of Peshawar. Since then, the Taliban have been successful in exploiting the generations-old sectarian conflict in the region as a way of challenging the government's writ in the Kurram agency (Perlez 2008).

The terror in Parachinar has been unrelenting. Parachinar's Shiite population has been subjected to abductions, violence, and murder. Sunnis perceived as being too friendly to the Shias have also been targeted (Ali 2009).

Mastung: Ethnic violence against the Hazaras in Mastung has also been on the rise in recent months. The Hazara are a Dari-speaking ethnic group native to Central Asia and are mostly Shia. Over a million Hazaras live in and around Quetta in Pakistan. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi has carried out a series of brutal attacks against the Hazaras. In the latest of these, LeJ militants killed 13 Shiites travelling on a bus on their way to work in Quetta on October 4, 2011. The Shias were forced off the bus, lined up, and shot. On September 20, 2011, LeJ killed 29 Shia pilgrims on their way to Iran. The heavily armed attackers forced the pilgrims off the bus, and while women and children were spared, they were made to watch the execution of their male relatives. This was the deadliest attack on the Shia community in Pakistan since a suicide bombing at a procession in Quetta that killed 57. Since 1999, the LeJ has killed over 400 Shia Hazaras in Balochistan. Despite this, elements within the government of Pakistan remain sympathetic towards the LeJ and Malik Ishaq, a founding member of the LeJ who was recently released on bail (Mir 2011).

Karachi: Pakistan's largest city has also seen its share of sectarian violence over the past few years. Ashura processions, marking the death of Imam Hussain bin Ali, the grandson of the Prophet (PBUH), have been targeted repeatedly. On December 28, 2009, a Shia procession was attacked by a suicide bomber on the Shia holy day of Ashura. The attack killed 30 and injured over 60 people. Following the attack, a Shia mob set fire to a market in the city (*The Guardian* 2009). On February 5, another Shia religious procession was attacked. In an audacious twin bombing, Shia mourners were attacked while in a procession on the busy Shahrah-e-Faisal, the main road that connects the airport to the city. As ambulances made their way to Jinnah hospital with the injured, another bomb went off in the premises of the hospital near the emergency ward. A total of 25 people were killed in the incident, 12 in the first and 13 in the second attack (*BBC* 2010). Attacks in the city have also targeted Imambargahs and Shia religious leaders. Most recently, the prayer leader of a mosque in Orangi Town was shot and killed near his home (*DAWN News* March 2011). Despite reassurance from the government, violence against the Shia community continues in Pakistan's commercial capital.

Postscript (2016)

Since the December 2014 attack on a school in Peshawar, the government of Pakistan announced tough counter-terrorism measures. A National Action Plan (NAP) was launched which, among other things, promised action against violent sectarianism and hate speech. The attack on young children in the army school rallied the public opinion against terrorism. Subsequently, the military has been busy fighting militants and clearing their hideouts in different parts of the country. A significant development has been the arrest of clerics who were guilty of spreading hate speech against rival sects. A major crackdown on Lashkar-e-Jhangvi has also taken place. Sectarian violence has decreased, but every now and then the militias reorganize and attack Shias or other minority groups in the country.

The Pakistani state needs to disband all armed militias and militant organizations, as decreed in the country's Constitution. Existing bans on sectarian organizations must be implemented in letter and spirit. The government has also vowed to reform madrassas in the country. New legislation on *madrassas* is required that would make registration of all such seminaries mandatory. At present, there are thousands of unregistered religious education outfits that preach sectarian views of Islam and act as recruitment centers for sectarian militias. Regulation is also required as to who, after verification of their credentials, can be a prayer leader at mosques and *madrassas*.

Most importantly, the state has to re-evaluate of its policy of support militant organizations as tools of foreign policy. The growth of non-state militias has caused much suffering and continues to divide the society along sectarian lines. It is time to reverse security policies that have evidently backfired.

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Half-Citizens? The Ahmadiyya Community of Pakistan

I grew up in Zia ul Haq's Pakistan. This was the time when we lived in a country that was being re-engineered as an "Islamic state." The state television had extensive programming on religion and even the television soaps, with some glorious exceptions, regurgitated the state narrative: Pakistan was an ideological state and needed to assume a new identity independent of its plural culture and thousands of years of history inherited from the Indian subcontinent. In this milieu, I was also subject to mild indoctrination through school textbooks, Friday prayer sermons, and societal, sometimes even familial, networks.

Perhaps the most categorical "fact" I learned was that Ahmadis, pejoratively known as Qadianis, were pretending to be Muslims while they were not. Teachers told us that this community had violated a central tenet of Islamic faith that concerned the finality of Prophethood, as the Ahmadiyya community believed that the founder of the sect Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was a "messenger" of sorts. The extended family members, school, and all other influences on a young mind had consensus on this "violation" of Islam. Of course there were dissenting voices, but they were muted and often scared of challenging the mainstream narrative ferociously backed by the state.

This narrative did not stop at excluding a formerly Muslim sect from the ambit of "Islam" as defined by mullahs. It also had larger political story. People would hold forth with scanty or no evidence that the Qadianis (as the community's founder was from a place called Qadian) — were Islam's enemies. They were British stooges, said the story, and had been raised by the British to weaken the Muslims and their faith. Some said that Ahmadis were given such importance because they rejected violent *jihad* and hence suited British purposes. Of course this theory gained currency as General Zia was resetting Pakistan's state as one created for *jihad*, to advance Pakistan and Islam's glory and to act as a fortress of the Islamic world or *Ummah*. Even today, Urdu papers regularly remind readers of all the conspiracies that Ahmadis are hatching against Pakistan.

As I grew up, I found out that this situation had roots in Pakistan's troubled history. In 1953, a series of violent agitations erupted against the Ahmadiyya movement in the city of Lahore. The riots were triggered by the Jamat-e-Islami, a political party led by Maulana Abul Ala Maududi, a Sunni theologian and strong critic of the Ahmadiyya movement. The riots resulted in over 2,000 deaths, brought martial law to Punjab, and led Governor General Ghulam Muhammad to dismiss the federal cabinet.

The anti-Ahmadi riots of the 1950s in the Punjab province were a major assertion by the Islamists of a new state that they could use a religious issue, or theological debate, for political ends. The riots took place in a province where being a member of Ahmadiyya community was hardly an issue. Thousands of Sunni families had a handful of members who had joined the Ahmadiyya movement. They co-existed with others and the differences were at best theoretical, subjects of intense debates, and by and large within the parameters of a civil discourse.

A judicial commission (comprising Justices Munir and Kayani) set up by the government investigated this incident, and its report makes for fascinating reading. In short, none of the clerics who appeared before the commission could define who was a "Muslim," and the judges were clear in their remarks:

Keeping in view the several definitions given by the *ulema* (scholars), need we make any comment except that no two learned divines are agreed on this fundamental. If we attempt our own definition as each learned divine has done and that definition differs from that given by all others, we unanimously go out of the fold of Islam. And if we adopt the definition given by any one of the *ulema*, we remain Muslims according to the view of that *alim* (scholar) but *kafirs* (infidels) according to the definition of everyone else.

Time and again, Pakistan's sane voices had argued for a state that was neutral and would not encourage bigotry nor issue certificates of Muslimness. But this advice was unheeded by politicians and generals who used religion as a political pastime.

As the power of the mullahs grew in Pakistan over the next two decades, the Ahmadi issue became a hobbyhorse for hardline Sunni clerics who thought that Islamic practices in Pakistan had to be cleansed and purified. The Ahmadi movement was seen as an aberration, a challenge and a bogey — all rolled into one. By the 1970s, this was a plank on which the insecure and smug mullahs stood ready to practice exclusion.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Pakistan's secular and avowedly socialist leader who was ruling a truncated Pakistan after the gory 1971 war, could not resist appeasing the religious lobby. He was not a bigot himself, but he viewed himself as an absolute ruler who should have the religious lobby under his belt after he had won over the poor, the middle classes,

and the intelligentsia of the country. Additionally, the role of Saudi Arabia and petrodollars was a factor in reshaping Pakistan's state. Thus came about the 1974 constitutional amendment that declared Ahmadis to be non-Muslims and set the course for Pakistan's slide into obscurantism and sectarian fragmentation. The infamous second amendment remains a blot on Pakistan's conscience and a *de jure* annulment of Jinnah's moderate agenda.

The founder of the country, despite his use of Muslim politics of the 1940s to create a separate "homeland," had been aware of the dangers of making the state a religious arbiter. On August 11, 1947, four days before the creation of the independent states of India and Pakistan, he declared that the state had nothing to do with religion and that all communities in Pakistan would be free to practice their faith. Pakistan's constitutions, so often since abrogated and amended, also enshrined this freedom. The 1974 second amendment to the Constitution ended this liberty, perhaps permanently. Given the trajectory of the post-Bhutto decades, it is now next to impossible to even amend this constitutional provision, let alone scrap it.

In 1974, the religious right had embarked on a fresh campaign against the Ahmadiyya movement, putting pressure on the government to criminalize the Ahmadis' religious practices and restrict them from claiming to be Muslims or "behaving" as Muslims. The campaign led to several Ahmadi deaths and the destruction of Ahmadi property, including the desecration of mosques and graves.

A seal of finality therefore was affixed on the fate of a community which overnight entered into the circle of nonbelievers. But this was not going to be the last act of the state. Bhutto's successor, General Zia, further entrenched this with legislation that took this discrimination to surreal heights. Even magical realists would be shy of indulging in such a narrative. By dint of an ordinance in 1984, Zia banned the use of Muslim symbols for the community. For instance, the Ahmadis could no longer use the word "mosque" for their places of worship. They could not print Quranic verses, and in the years to come, cases were registered against those who used "Bismillah" (an Islamic way of initiating an act) on wedding cards.

Under this ordinance, the Ahmadis were not allowed to propagate their faith in "any way, directly or indirectly." The law barred Ahmadis from using traditional Islamic greetings, performing the Muslim call for prayer, and publicly quoting the Quran. Offenders were to be fined and imprisoned for terms up to three years.

No one was spared. Even the only Nobel laureate from Pakistan, Dr. Abdus Salam, was shunned, as he was a proud Pakistani not shy of his Ahmadi identity. The tombstone on his grave has been desecrated and stares in the face of a country that by and large remains oblivious of such apartheid.

I still have little clue about the theological debates. The issue is mired in competing narratives: the mainstream, dominant narrative (which was supported by all other sects in 1974); the version by the Ahmadiyya community; and that of various legal and Islamic scholars. Frankly, the religious identity of the Ahmadis has little interest for me. Their citizenship is the question: whether the state, rather than the individual, may define who is a Muslim and who is not.

The population of Pakistan comprises 98 percent Muslims (majority) and 2 percent non-Muslims (minorities). Article 20 of the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973, says: "Subject

to law, public order and morality — (a) every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice and propagate his religion; and (b) every religious denomination and every sect thereof shall have the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions.”

However, the second amendment to the Constitution declares the Ahmadis, a professed Muslim sect, to be non-Muslims. Thus, while the Constitution provides the guarantee given in Article 20, there is one class of citizens who have become an anomaly. After being officially declared as non-Muslims, Ahmadis find themselves in a no man's land where they are not considered a sect of Muslims nor can they be classified like the other minorities with separate religious denominations.

Pakistan's popular culture reflects this same attitude of the state. The country's largest media group has rehired a televangelist who churns out apparently peaceful, or shall we say soft-Islamism for the religious, actual, and aspiring middle classes (now estimated to be anywhere between 30-40 percent of the total population). This is a great market to which to sell piety, worship, and devotion. This televangelist is also the vice chair of the entire network and has made a name for himself in a short period of time. It is a separate matter that he holds a dubious degree from an unknown educational institution somewhere on the Internet, but the power of religious whitewash means nothing for his viewers and more importantly for the media group.

In 2008, this anchorperson conducted a program in his earlier stint with the channel where he commented on the nature of the second 1974 constitutional amendment that had deemed the Ahmadiyya community to be non-Muslims. Towards the end of his show, he declared the Ahmadis to be *wajibul qatl* (liable to be killed). Immediately following this particular broadcast, an Ahmadi doctor, Abdul Mannan Siddiqi, was shot dead in Mirpur Khas, Sindh, on September 8, 2008. The next day, another Ahmadi, Seth Muhammad Yousaf, was assassinated in Nawabshah, Sindh.

From the 1980s to the present day, articulation of this inciting and dangerous perception of the Ahmadiyya community has entered into the mainstream culture. Countless Ahmadis suffer from day-to-day discrimination in their workplace and communities. Constrained by an apartheid legal framework and bashed daily by ultra-right elements, they suffer incidents of persecution, harassment, and even targeted killings, which are ignored by the authorities and society in general.

The rage against Ahmadis is not merely due to theocratic differences but also to deeper, socially rooted causes. While many Muslims in Pakistan disagree with the religious leanings of Muslims of other sects, it does not cause them to have public death warrants issued and displayed. Ahmadis are not just viewed with apathy, but there is also a certain degree of maliciousness embedded in stereotypes due to a history of persecution.

Yet the position of Ahmadis toward the Pakistani polity has remained a relatively docile one; they have never significantly challenged the position of the state. In fact, according to Hussain Naqi, a leading human rights defender, the Ahmadis supported the creation of Pakistan while the hardline religious groups like the Ahrars opposed it bitterly. Yet now these same religious groups have become self-styled patriots of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and consider the Ahmadis not fit to live in this country and “liable to be killed.”

This prejudice also manifests in the educational system. In schools and universities,

Ahmadi students and teachers are denied treatment on equal footing. The ways of harassment range from social boycotts and expulsion to threats and violence by students, teachers, and administrators belonging to the Muslim majority sect. A few events of recent past illustrate this malaise. In November 2011, a girl student, Rabia, of the prestigious Comsats College in Lahore, was taken into custody after she tore down some anti-Ahmadi posters put up on her university premises. The incident led to several anti-Ahmadi protests at the college. In October 2011, the son of an Ahmadi teacher who studied at a post-graduate college in Kotli was beaten and severely injured after his father, who taught at the same institute, removed some anti-Ahmadiyya inscriptions put up in the classroom.

In August 2011, seven students belonging to the Ahmadiyya group were expelled from various schools in Pachnand, district Chakwal. In September 2011, ten Ahmadi students and a teacher were expelled from two local schools in Dahrnawali, Faisalabad district. The incident occurred after a *fatwa* was passed by a local mullah who decided to deny equal education and burial rights to Ahmadis.

In December 2010, Ahmadi students faced discrimination in the crucial matriculation examinations conducted by the Secondary Board of Education, Punjab. The students were made to categorize themselves as either Muslims or non-Muslims. Yet choosing the “Muslim” option would make them liable to three years’ imprisonment, and selecting the “non-Muslim” option would be a negation of their own faith.

There is absolutely nothing that the Ahmadis can do on their own without the government’s help to prevent abuse of their community. The anti-Ahmadi amendments of 1974 and 1984 managed to create legal justification for persecuting Ahmadis and were upheld by the Supreme Court. Unless the state decides to take active steps to put an end to Ahmadi persecution, there is little hope that things will change. However, Ahmadis have started to rely on their communal networks, and as a closely-knit community, they have increasingly withdrawn from public life. Many Ahmadis do not report harassment to authorities out of the fear of being labeled and inviting more persecution.

The Ahmadis were always a hardworking and better educated segment of society, as noted by an urban professional who does not want to be named. “As a result of years of persecution and discrimination, the Ahmadis’ role in public life has been decimated over time. Although no explicit law exists, a declared Ahmadi can hardly be promoted beyond the rank of captain in the armed forces,” he adds. Yasser Lateef Hamdani, a young lawyer and rights activist who happens to be a fellow editor at a blogzine I publish, complains that “discrimination also exists in the judiciary, as a person known to be belonging to the Ahmadiyya community is not allowed to be a high-positioned judge.” Many hold that the socioeconomic status of the community has been badly hit by marginalization.

Hamdani, who has been following the community’s travails and also writes boldly in the papers, told me a while ago that the “20- 25 percent of Ahmadi population which constituted the community’s intelligentsia has emigrated.” But the option of immigrating, he adds, is “limited to those who can afford to do so. Since most Ahmadis belong to the middle or lower middle class, they have limited means to pack up and leave the country.”

On May 28, 2010, I was trying to finish a long day's work in my Lahore office. We had a television set in the reception area, and as I passed by to fix a cup of tea, I saw the horrific live coverage of the Ahmadi "mosques" in Lahore being attacked. It was a gruesome moment whose images will never leave my memory. Two mosques — and they were later corrected on TV channels as "places of worship" — were being attacked in my own city. Lahore, a citadel of subcontinent's pluralism, where non-Muslims were a majority at the time of Partition and which boasts of Pakistan's literary, intellectual, and political movements, was killing a banished sect. This is also the age of the Taliban and their offshoot, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, who were indulging in free-for-all butchery. The attacks happened almost simultaneously on Darl ul Zikr (a place of spirituality) in the congested area of Garhi Shahu and Bait ul Noor (the place of light) in the posh locality of Model Town. More than 90 people were killed and another 109 injured. Model Town was founded by a Hindu lawyer in the 1920s with a vision for modernity, and Hindus and Muslims lived there side by side. Such ironies cannot be lost.

Shell-shocked, I stood before the TV with tears in my eyes. Seeing the fabric of your surroundings torn asunder is unsettling. Watching me in great agony, a co-worker asked politely if I was an Ahmadi. I told him that I wasn't (giving him a temporary bout of relief) but couldn't help noticing his level of desensitization. Later in the evening, other than in the liberal bubble of friends, I found the responses to this terrible event disturbingly low-key.

These attacks had occurred during Friday prayers, and the absence of an effective police presence enabled terrorists to succeed in their ghastly operation. Two terrorists were apprehended by Ahmadi youth in the Model Town mosque and handed over to the police. The terrorists in the Garhi Shahu mosque could not be caught and eventually blew themselves up, increasing the number of casualties there. Three days following the attacks, attackers stormed Jinnah Hospital in Lahore, where several Ahmadis injured in the Friday mosque attacks were under treatment. The terrorists attempted to free a fellow militant who was under treatment at the hospital. Six additional people were killed in the incident.

Soon this tragedy grew even greater by the apathy displayed by the political parties, the media, and even the intelligentsia. The only brave man to visit the survivors of this attack was Punjab's Governor Salmaan Taseer, who was assassinated eight months later by a zealot who mistook his sympathies for a poor Christian woman as an act of condoning "blasphemy." Pakistan's former prime minister and head of his faction of the Muslim League, Nawaz Sharif was the only national leader to condemn the attacks, though he stayed away from the controversy and later his supporters diluted what he had said about the hate crime.

A year before the May 2010 attack, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan had warned the government of the potential threat; however, the government had ignored the warning. Meanwhile, the provincial ruling party in the Punjab had sponsored a public meeting at which many anti-Ahmadi presenters preached hatred. The vernacular press and Urdu television channels had also inflamed anti-Ahmadi sentiment. All these entrenched attitudes and practices fed into the horrendous carnage of Ahmadis that took place in the unbearable heat of May 2010.

The exclusionist status conferred to Ahmadis in Pakistan's constitution requires them to sufficiently differentiate their places of worship from those of other Muslims. There

have been numerous incidents where mobs besieged Ahmadi places of worship and forced local police to vacate the place of Quranic verses or Muslim wall hangings.

Two years after the Lahore bloodshed, in May 2012, a group of people in complicity with the police ordered an Ahmadi place of worship in Sultanabad to demolish its minarets as they made it look like a mosque. After intense negotiations, the guardians of the place were finally allowed to cover the building architecture in order to avoid any resemblance to a mosque. Another “mosque” in Rawalpindi was closed, however, as the zealots thought it was harming the future of “real” Islam.

The 2010 attack was most brutal, but it had been preceded by several incidents of discrimination. In 1995, two members of Ahmadiyya community were publicly stoned in the town of Shab Qadar in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province. Dr. Rashid Ahmad and his son-in-law, Riaz Ahmad Khan, were attacked by a mob, as they were about to attend a court hearing in the city. Dr. Rashid Ahmad was critically injured, while Riaz Ahmed was stoned to death and his corpse was desecrated. According to Amnesty International, the incident happened in the presence of the police, who just “stood and watched.” In 2000, gunmen attacked an Ahmadi prayer meeting near the town of Sialkot, killing at least five worshippers and wounding another seven.

In 2005, gunmen attacked worshippers in an Ahmadi mosque in Mandi Bahauddin, Punjab, killing eight members of the Ahmadi community. In April of 2010, three Ahmadis were killed in Faisalabad when armed militants intercepted their car and opened indiscriminate fire. Later in May 2010, an Ahmadi was killed and his son seriously injured in Narowal by an attacker who claimed to have drawn inspiration from a mosque sermon delivered by a local Sunni cleric.

Since 1974, more than 250 Ahmadis have been killed in Pakistan. Meanwhile, many places of worships have been vandalized and others closed. Even community graveyards have been desecrated. Businesses of persons belonging to Ahmadi community have been attacked, and working professionals, such as doctors and engineers, have been killed while performing their duties.⁴⁴

Half-citizens?

When applying for a passport or a national ID card, Pakistanis are required to declare Mirza Ghulam Ahmed (the founder of the Ahmadi movement) as an imposter and his followers as non-Muslims. According to the Election Laws of Pakistan, the basis for voters’ eligibility is Pakistani citizenship only. Until the time of General Zia, the electoral system was based on a joint electorate system for all Pakistani citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation. Ahmadis used to participate in all elections equally with the rest of the population. Bhutto allocated reserved seats to minorities in addition to the general seats. Representatives for the reserved seats were to be elected by the assembly members. As Ahmadis did not accept the imposed status of a religious minority (as “non-Muslims”), they never pursued these seats.

In 1985, Zia imposed the system of a separate electorate through the 8th amendment to the 1973 Constitution. Since then, elections have been held on the basis of separate

electoral lists for different religious groups. Those who claim to be Muslims have to sign a certificate denying being Ahmadis. In 2002, General Musharraf went back to the joint electorate system; however, he introduced a separate supplementary list of voters through a chief executive order, in which Ahmadi voters were defined as non-Muslims. Subsequent regulations have also reinforced this discrimination, and millions of Ahmadi voters do not exercise their right, as by doing so they would need to declare themselves as non-Muslims in the eyes of the law.

This systemic discrimination has been carefully designed. During Zia's time, a concerted policy following this exclusionist approach was pursued of recruiting people to the armed forces, the civilian bureaucracy, the judiciary, the media and educational institutes.

The result has been legislation, court judgments, and textbooks that promote an exclusivist state ideology. Subsequent governments have made little or no effort to reverse the process. During the time of President Musharraf there was a move to amend the procedures of the blasphemy law; however, this did not materialize due to pressure from the mullahs.

Two examples reflect how even the democratic forces are reluctant to engage seriously with the issue and skirt the problems of minority rights. One is the Education Policy of 2009, whose fourth chapter is devoted to Islamic education. This kind of aggressive propagation of the state version of Islam serves to alienate minorities. The other instance is the 18th amendment to the Constitution, which was hailed as having restored the Constitution to its original democratic character. Sadly, the lawmakers did not touch the Islamic provisions inserted by Bhutto and Zia. In fact, the amendment goes a step further, making it mandatory for the prime minister also to be a Muslim, in addition to this condition already existing for the president of Pakistan.

The plight of Ahmadis is not just a religious issue. It is an issue of citizenship and its brazen denial to a group of people. Pakistan will have to review these many troubling constitutional provisions, as they embolden the state and extremist elements to indulge in persecuting this minority. The citizenship instruments — national ID, passport and other declaration forms — require urgent amendments.

Pakistan can still change from a country where zealots hunt non-Muslims on its streets. But at present, Shias, Ismailis, or any other sect that does not conform to the puritanical Wahabi-Deobandi-Salafi axis is easily declared as “liable to be killed.” The haunting words of the 1954 Munir-Kayani Commission rightly concluded, after hearing the testimonies of religious scholars:

The net result of all this is that neither Shias nor Sunnis nor Deobandis nor Ahl-i-Hadith nor Barelvis are Muslims, and any change from one view to the other must be accompanied in an Islamic State with the penalty of death if the Government of the State is in the hands of the party which considers the other party to be *kafirs*. And it does not require much imagination to judge of

the consequences of this doctrine when it is remembered that no two *ulema* have agreed before us as to the definition of a Muslim.

In the meantime, most of the Ahmadiyya community lives in Pakistan, coping with a difficult and sometimes dangerous climate. In consequence, members of this sect are now spread all over the world. Since the 1980s, their dynastic leader lives in the U.K. and provides guidance through a dedicated TV channel, literature, and fostering networks. The Ahmadis who live in Pakistan, or for that matter Bangladesh, spend their lives seeking anonymity, relying on each other, and invoking divine protection, as state institutions have little to offer. Not all members of the beleaguered community can emigrate, but those who can afford to have been moving abroad.

Pakistan has no choice but to turn back to Jinnah's words of August 11, 1947, when he envisioned that the religious identities would remain a personal choice under a progressive, democratic state. Instead, the national security doctrines have used religion, its extremist articulations, and allied militant groups to achieve various policy goals. The task of undoing this historical trend involves a comprehensive reform of state institutions, the education system, and most importantly foreign policy. All of this is not possible without a political consensus, which is sadly missing. The power of religious groups has grown to the extent that even the state is on the defensive. It will be a decade-long battle to reverse the tide. Sooner than later, such an existential choice will have to be made.

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Education, Religion, and Conflict in Pakistan

Pakistan's education crisis is severe. Almost half of children of school-going age are not in school. In conflict-affected areas such as Baluchistan province, nearly 66 percent don't have access to schooling. The government spends less than 2 percent of the GDP on education, and the financing gap is filled by foreign aid and private or charitable funders. In recent years, the increased number of *madrassas* promoting extreme interpretations of Islam and funding from dubious sources has raised the possibility that those who do access education are being indoctrinated into ideologies that either sympathize with or promote various forms of violent extremism.

Yet it would be unwise to consider *madrassas* as the main source of radicalization. Since the 1970s, the educational system and state curriculum have been used as a political tool for promoting an Islamo-nationalist ideology that is dangerously counter-democratic. In the words of Pervez Hoodbhoy, a Pakistani public intellectual, both schools and *madrassas* produce "fiery zealots, fuelled with a passion for *jihad* and martyrdom."⁴⁵ Pakistan's education system urgently needs to be reimagined and restructured to ensure societal stability.

Pakistan's enduring internal conflict over the past few decades is well documented and often attributed to a dysfunctional foreign policy and restructuring of Pakistan's legal and political system to create a hybrid theocratic state.⁴⁶ Two decades of geopolitical struggles centered in Afghanistan have not helped either. During the 1980s, the emergence of political *jihad* as a policy tool, backed by the international community, was a watershed in the country's history. A deliberate state choice was made to use a violent version of *jihad* (literally, struggle) as a counterweight to India and its influence in Afghanistan. Consequently, violent manifestations of Islamism have penetrated the fabric of Pakistani society through sectarian strife and the rise of the Pakistani Taliban as a force committed to annihilate the existing Pakistani regime. However, it would be simplistic to reduce the country's metamorphosis into a hybrid-theocracy to its foreign policy agenda alone.

Pakistan's birth in 1947 had opened the question of identity, whereby the new nation was torn between the idea of transnational Islam and imperatives of a modern nation-state. Ever since, Pakistan's successive governments, elected and non-elected, have used Islam as a political tool. They have pandered to the demands of the religious right for the creation of an "Islamic" state, given that the country was created for the "welfare" of Muslims living in undivided British India. Islam was invoked as the unifying factor between the disparate Western and Eastern Wing (now Bangladesh), and insufficient attention was paid to the regional and ethnic quests for political expression and power sharing. Pakistan's dismemberment in 1971 therefore created another watershed where the influence of a more democratic and secular Eastern Wing disappeared, leaving the polity open to the re-assertion of an Islamist identity.

In 1973, Pakistan was declared an Islamic Republic and the avowedly "secular" Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto began a process of Islamization. In 1974, in response to the demands of the religious lobbies, the Ahmadiyya sect was declared "non-Muslim." By 1977, Bhutto had declared Friday as a holiday and banned alcohol and gambling. His

successor, General Zia ul Haq, took this further, introducing a wide variety of Sharia laws and ushering in an era of ideological statehood that continues to date.

This, perhaps the most notable shift, saw the construction of what is now widely known as the “ideology of Pakistan.” First introduced in the late 1960s during the government of General Yahya Khan, in the 1980s this vague, undefined notion was embedded into the Constitution. The penal code was also amended to conflate the “safety” and “sovereignty” of Pakistan with “ideology,” creating an Islamo-nationalist identity of Pakistan that the highest officials of the state were bound to protect.⁴⁷

Concurrently, Pakistan also witnessed the rise of religious extremism as a legitimate policy tool. This was employed to support the Afghan *jihad* and later the insurgency in Indian-occupied Kashmir

— a key dispute between the two neighbors. Even civilian democrats have accepted this “national security” agenda that entails an alliance with both violent and nonviolent religious, sectarian, and extremist groups to ensure Pakistan’s defense against anticipated Indian aggression. This has meant that internal and external resources flowed to the religious right through charitable and private donations and foreign funding for the decade-long Afghanistan *jihad* project. The religious right has therefore been able to organize its grassroots structures and propaganda capabilities to influence the functioning of the state. Over time, religious parties and sectarian-militant organizations have transformed into pressure groups with the ability to mobilize the streets through networks of mosques, religious seminaries, and charities. The use of religion has become a legitimate mode of furthering political objectives.

The education system has been a major vehicle in creating support for jihadist ventures as well as in embedding an undefined Islamic “ideology” as a core part of citizenship. During the 1980s, the state curriculum underwent radical revisions. The Zia regime decreed Islamic studies and Pakistan studies as compulsory subjects for schools and universities, even for engineering and medicine degrees. By using religious instruction, the Pakistani state has systematically introduced generations to an exclusivist ideology, where a peculiar interpretation of *jihad* is propagated as part of security policy.⁴⁸ Today, this lays the foundations for widespread acceptance of ideologically motivated violence. Textbooks portray a victim narrative, where the entire world is conspiring against Muslims and Islam and Pakistan are under siege.

After 9/11, the Musharraf regime, under pressure from the international community, announced plans to revise the curriculum and to delete passages advocating *jihad*. In 2001, curriculum reforms were initiated but in a phased manner because of fears of a backlash from the religious right. In 2003, Pakistani authorities announced that a curriculum revision would take place every five years through an institutionalized process.⁴⁹ In 2006, a new curriculum policy was also announced, but it could not be fully implemented before Musharraf was ousted in 2007. In 2009, the new National Education Policy recognized that three parallel education systems — public, private and religious — had “created unequal opportunities for students.”⁵⁰ But it failed to address the ideological components of the curriculum, and no net increase in spending on education materialized.⁵¹

Educational reforms are urgently needed if Pakistan is to maintain and foster a democratic society. In 2004, the Sustainable Development Policy Institute, a Pakistani think tank, highlighted that the state-mandated curriculum “contained material that was directly

contrary to the goals and values of a progressive, moderate, and democratic Pakistan.”⁵² A 10th grade textbook, for instance, tells students that:

In Pakistan, ideology and foreign policy are intertwined. Pakistan is an ideological state and is based on Islamic ideology. The important objective of Pakistan's Foreign Policy is the defense of ideological frontiers. Pakistan's stability is also implicit in the protection of the Ideology of Pakistan. It can protect its ideology by establishing good relations with Islamic countries.

This curriculum is not limited to public schools. Pakistan's growing demand for education has resulted in a mushrooming of private schools bound by the same curriculum. Millions of Pakistani children, over at least three generations, have been tutored in a quasi-Islamist, xenophobic, and Muslim-supremacist fashion.

Madrassas have also proliferated across the country. According to Pakistan's Ministry of Education, in 2012 there were over 13,000 *madrassas* in the country. Of these religious schools, 97 percent were in the private sector, with a total enrollment of nearly 1.8 million children.⁵³ While this may be just less than five percent of the total of school-going children, they produce Pakistan's mosque leaders and clerics. An overwhelming majority of *madrassas* belong to the Deobandi school of thought, which is close to extremist Wahabi-Salafi belief and has trained the leadership of the Taliban movement.

Many in Pakistan agree that extremism is the key threat to the survival of the state and its society. With the rise of armed militias — there are currently at least three-dozen groups across the country — the space available to the national government for policy shifts has been greatly reduced. Today, politicians fear that changing the curriculum might open a Pandora's box.

Since the amendments to the Constitution in 2010, authority to set the curriculum has devolved to provincial governments. Progress in the past four years has not been encouraging. In the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, for example, there is an intense ideological struggle underway, with the Jamat-e-Islami wishing to revise the earlier changes that secularized the curriculum. In the Punjab, clerics and their supporters in the media have resisted even minor changes. Private schools have been dissuaded from teaching comparative religion as a subject. In Sindh province, some changes have been made, but it is unclear if they will hold, given the power of the local Islamist groups.

In the short to medium term, the situation is not likely to change and indoctrination will continue.

The *madrassa* reform story is even more instructive. In 2001, the Musharraf administration promulgated a “Pakistan *Madrassa* Education Board Ordinance,” despite resistance mounted by the religious lobby.⁵⁴ The new law mandated that *madrassas* should teach English, mathematics, and computer science. Another law calling for voluntary registration and regulation was enacted in 2002, assuring state funding for *madrassas* that formally registered with the government.⁵⁵ Weak implementation and wide resistance has resulted in a small fraction of *madrassas* accepting curricular reforms since then.⁵⁶

In early 2014, the current government launched the National Internal Security Policy (NISP). This identified *madrassas* as a potential “security” concern because of their ability to “spread extremism” and their tendency to cultivate intolerant and “violent religious attitudes.”⁵⁷ In a bold departure from the past, the NISP stated that *madrassas* were engaged in spreading radicalization literature, advocating complete rejection of other beliefs, and preaching sectarian indoctrination. Thus the NISP sought to initiate a comprehensive review and reformation of the *madrassa* system and called for laws “supporting the administration, financial audit, and curriculum accreditation” of *madrassas*.⁵⁸ Similar objectives were stated in the National Action Plan (NAP) announced in the aftermath of the deadly attacks on a Peshawar school in December 2014.

Although the Pakistani parliament has endorsed the NISP and NAP, the implementation remains patchy, especially with respect to the seminaries and the school curricula. Not unlike previous reform efforts, this also seems to be falling victim to institutional inertia, a lack of political will, and the fear of a backlash from the religious lobby. More importantly, negligible funds have been allocated to fulfill all these ambitious targets under the NAP.

Since 2002, the international community has invested substantial resources to reform the education system of Pakistan. Under the Kerry-Lugar-Berman aid package, the United States spent \$450 million on education reforms in Pakistan up to 2012.⁵⁹ One of the aims of U.S. aid was to initiate changes in the curriculum.⁶⁰ The United Kingdom has also invested a sizeable portion of its aid into the education system. However, given the sensitivity of the issue, the U.K. is not making curriculum reform a priority but instead focuses on getting children back into classrooms.

This is all very well, but in the long term such a fragmented strategy is only likely to have negative consequences. The international community must not refrain from articulating the imperative of fixing Pakistan’s education system and the ideological content of its curriculum. Aid packages must take stock of the way young minds are being influenced. Ultimately, it will require a broad coalition of Pakistan’s political parties, civil society, and media to initiate changes and build a consensus that radicalizing young minds can only harm the country’s future.

¹Online August 10, 2012, at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-19211843>.

²The full text of Jinnah's speech available online at http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/legislation/constituent_address_11aug1947.html/.

³*Ibid.*

⁴Benazir Bhutto, *Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy, and the West*. New York: Harper, 2008.

⁵Library of Congress, February 2005. Online August 10, 2012, at <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Pakistan.pdf>.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷Population Census Organization, Govt. of Pakistan. Online August 10, 2012 at <http://www.census.gov.pk/Religion.htm>.

⁸This term has been used by Ayesha Siddiqi, a Pakistani scholar. I have used it narrowly. Siddiqi holds that Pakistan is turning into a hybrid-theocratic state “which encapsulates a mix of economic neo-liberalism, pockets of social liberalism, formal theocracy and larger spaces experiencing informal theocracy.” Online at <http://www.thefridaytimes.com/beta2/tft/article.php?issue=20120309&page=2>.

⁹Full text of the Objectives Resolution, now a preamble to the Pakistani Constitution, is available at <http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/constitution/preamble.html>.

¹⁰Online August 6, 2012, at http://www.real-islam.org/73_8.htm.

¹¹For a detailed discussion, see Sadia Toor's *The State of Islam*, New York: Pluto Press, 2011.

¹²March 17, 2010. Online August 9, 2012, at http://dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010%5C03%5C17%5Cstory_17-3-2010_pg7_6.

¹³An Urdu mistranslation of the term “secularism” — “irreligious” or “anti-religion” — introduced and popularized by Islamic parties in Pakistan.

¹⁴“SC's responsibility?” Editorial, *Daily DAWN*. Online at <http://archives.dawn.com/archives/32294>.

¹⁵For an impassioned case, read this: <http://hindusofsindh.wordpress.com/2012/08/03/sindh-from-rinkle-kumari-to-migration-of-hindus/>.

¹⁶The third schedule has oaths of office where all senior constitutional functionaries such as the president, prime minister, chairman senate, speaker national assembly, and others, have to swear: “That I will strive to preserve the Islamic Ideology which is the basis for the creation of Pakistan.”

¹⁷July 26, 2012. Online 10 Aug. 2012, at <http://tribune.com.pk/story/413153/> under-constitution-minorities-are-deemed-less-preferred-citizens-says-jurist/.

¹⁸July 25, 2012. Online August 9, 2012, at <http://tribune.com.pk/story/412699/> assembly-representation-mps-devise-plan-to-increase-minority-seats/.

¹⁹Article 2-A makes the Objectives Resolution of 1949 an operative part of the Constitution and thus justiceable. Prior to this, it was a preamble in all constitutions (i.e., 1956 and 1962) of Pakistan.

²⁰The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, *Pakistan’s Legislative History, Pakistan Penal Code*. Online August 10, 2012.

²¹Added explanations in parentheses are by the author.

²²Ammar Shahbazi. “Hindus outraged over live conversion on TV,” *The News International*, July 30, 2012. Online August 9, 2012.

²³Rinkle Kumari, a 19-year-old Pakistani Hindu, was allegedly kidnapped by one Naveed Shah and forcibly converted to Islam so that they could be married. Eventually, the Supreme Court of Pakistan took notice of the case and sent Kumari — now named Faryal Bibi — to a shelter (forcibly, as Marvi Sirmed claims in her article: <http://www.thefridaytimes.com/beta2/tft/article.php?issue=20120413&page=9>).

²⁴In August 2012, a 14- (some reports say 16-) year-old Hindu girl named Manisha Kumari disappeared from her parents’ home in Jacobabad; a few days later, she called her parents and informed them of her “voluntary” conversion to Mahvish and of her marriage to one Ghulam Mustafa Channa. Manisha’s parents maintain that she was abducted.

²⁵Marvi Sirmed. “Rinkle Kumari — the New Marvi of Sindh.” *The Friday Times*, April 13-19, 2012. Online 10 Aug. 2012.

²⁶Marvi Sirmed. “Rinkle Kumari — a test case for Jinnah’s Pakistan.” *The Friday Times*, May 25-31, 2012. Online 10 Aug. 2012..

²⁷Zia ur Rehman. “Report: Extremism gains ground in Sindh.” *The Friday Times*,

October 21-27, 2011. Online August 10, 2012.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹“Half a country, half a life.” *Fountain Ink Magazine*, August 7, 2012. Online August 9, 2012.

³⁰“Sindh — From Rinkle Kumari to Migration of Hindus.” *Indigenous Sindhis*, August 3, 2012. Online Aug 10, 2012.

³¹Online at <http://tribune.com.pk/story/365257/international-peasants-day-sindh-has-the-highest-landlessness-among-farm-workers/>.

³²The decision of Shariat Appellate Bench of the Supreme Court dated August 10, 1989, in Qazalbash Waqf v. Chief Land Commissioner (PLD 1990 SC 99).

³³Raza Rumi. “Lesser citizens.” *Fountain Ink Magazine*, August 7, 2012. Online August 9, 2012.

³⁴Saleem Javed. “Hope fades away for Hazaras of Pakistan.” June 29, 2012. Online August 9, 2012, at <http://dawn.com/2012/06/29/hope-fades-away-for-hazaras-of-pakistan/>.

³⁵According to the “International Religious Freedom Report” for 2011, “the country’s interpretation of Islamic law allows offenders to offer monetary restitution to victims and allows victims to carry out physical retribution rather than seeking punishment through the court system.” See <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/193145.pdf>. Shia killings have increased in recent years, and banned militant outfits and their leaders have been set free by the courts due to lack of effective prosecution.

³⁶The author would like to acknowledge the research, data collection, and inputs made by Osama Nadeem, Pakistan Policy Group, Lahore.

³⁷“After Al Qaeda had in early 2002 made Karachi its operational headquarters and started to disseminate its philosophy to local sectarian organizations in addition to forming an operational relationship with various jihadi groups based in Karachi” (Chishti 2011).

³⁸“In Karachi Al Qaeda remains the biggest terrorist planning and financing organization whereas TTP (Qari Zafar Group), with its huge Mehsud population based in Karachi’s outskirts provides logistical support and suicide bombers. The operational aspects are entirely outsourced to the sectarian terrorist groups like Jandullah and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (that transformed into ‘Jandullah’). It was on a visit to Karachi that Faisal Shehzad was picked up by TTP in preparation for the Manhattan bomb-

ing” (Chishti 2010).

³⁹“In January of 2003 Jack Thomas — an Australian Al Qaeda fugitive — was captured in Karachi which gave ‘actionable intelligence’ on the whereabouts of KSM who was finally caught in Rawalpindi in March — too late to prevent the beheading of Daniel Pearl and the establishment of a strong nexus with the local sectarian groups working in Karachi, including Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, which had turned into Al Qaeda’s B team along with another spinoff name ‘Jandullah’”(Chishti 2010).

⁴⁰The Deobandi school of Sunni Islam gestated in the Dar ul Uloom Deoband seminary in Northern India. The seminary brought together Muslims who were hostile to British rule in India and committed to a literal and austere interpretation of Islam. The Deobandi school of thought has considerable clout in Pakistan today due to state patronage accorded to the creed in the past.

⁴¹Khaled Ahmed (2011) equates “High Church” Islam with the Deobandi and Ahl-e-Hadith creeds, which are more austere and puritanical, and “Low Church” with the mystic Sufi creeds native to the plains of Punjab and Sindh and the Bareilvi school of Sunni Islam, which is tolerant of the native shrine culture.

⁴²A Bareilvi cleric, who publicly opposed Taliban tactics and ideology, was brutally murdered at his Lahore *madrassa* in 2009.

⁴³For more details, please see International Crisis Group, 2005. Asia Report No. 95. Online at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/pakistan/095-the-state-of-sectarianism-in-pakistan.aspx>.

⁴⁴Zafar Karimi and Abubakar Siddique, “Pakistan’s Ahmadi Minority Decry Persecution,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 16, 2015, at <http://gandhara.rferl.org/a/pakistan-ahmadi-persecution/26961630.html>.

⁴⁵P. Hoodbhoy, “Can Pakistan Work? A Country in Search of Itself,” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2004, at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/60285/pervez-hoodbhoy/can-pakistan-work-a-country-in-search-of-itself>.

⁴⁶A. Siddiqi, “Pakistan’s Modernity: Between the Military and Militancy,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLVI, No. 51, December 17, 2011, at <http://www.epw.in/special-articles/pakistans-modernity-between-military-and-militancy.html>.

⁴⁷See Section 123-A, *Pakistan Penal Code*. Online at <http://www.lawofpakistan.com/pakistanpenalcode/123-A.php>.

⁴⁸M.S. Awan, “Impact of Radical Islamisation of Education on Pakistani Society,” *Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2012. Online at <http://paki->

staniaat.org/index.php/pak/article/view/163/163.

⁴⁹B.R. Jamil, "Curriculum Reforms in Pakistan – A Glass Half Full or Half Empty?" Presented to India's National Council of Educational Research and Training Conference, August 1-12, 2009, p.3. Online at <http://www.itacec.org/document/nep09/NCERT%20Pakistan%20paper%20BRJ.pdf>.

⁵⁰Ministry for Education Government of Pakistan, *National Education Policy*, 2009, p. 27. Online at <http://unesco.org.pk/education/teachereducation/files/National%20Education%20Policy.pdf>.

⁵¹I. Junaidi, "Education budget decreased despite promises," *Dawn.com*, 5 June 2014, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1110706>.

⁵²A.H. Nayyar and A. Salim (eds.), "The Subtle Subversion: The State of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan," *Report of the project "A Civil Society Initiative in Curricula and Textbooks Reform"*, Pakistan, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, 2004, p. 8. Online at <http://www.sdpi.org/publications/files/State%20of%20Curr&TextBooks.pdf>.

⁵³N. Amin, et al., *Pakistan Education Statistics 2011-12*, Pakistan, Ministry of Education Government of Pakistan, 2013, p. 22. Online at http://unesco.org.pk/education/documents/2013/pslm/Pakistan_Education_Statistics.pdf.

⁵⁴F. ul-Islam, "Reforms in Religious Madaris of Pakistan," *The Dialogue*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2009, pp. 198-215. Online at http://www.qurtuba.edu.pk/thedialogue/The%20Dialogue/4_2/03_fakhr_islam.pdf.

⁵⁵G. Shabir, M.U.F. Abbasi, and A. Khan, "Reforming the *Madrassah* System," *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 2012, pp. 147-156. Online at http://www.bzu.edu.pk/PJSS/Vol32No12012/Final_PJSS-32-1-11.pdf.

⁵⁶Khurram Shahzad, "Pakistan *madrassah* reforms in tatters," *Hindustan Times*, July 16, 2009. Online at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/pakistan-madrassah-reforms-in-tatters/article1-432767.aspx>.

⁵⁷Ministry of Interior Government of Pakistan, *National Internal Security Policy 2014- 2018*. Online at http://nacta.gov.pk/Download_s/Rules/030314_NISP_Concept-Paper.pdf.

⁵⁸Ministry of Interior Government of Pakistan, *National Internal Security Policy: 2014- 18*, p. 6. Online at http://nacta.gov.pk/Download_s/Rules/NISP.pdf.

⁵⁹USAID, *USAID in Pakistan: Strengthening Our Partnership, Continuing Our Progress*, Washington, USAID, 2013, p. 21. Online at http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1871/USAID_PAKISTAN_Report%202013_0.pdf.

⁶⁰U.S. Congress, “Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2009,” January 6, 2009. Online at <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/111/s1707/text>.

Perspectives From afar

Exile for Me and Others

Little did I know that a sojourn to recover from a trauma would turn into exile for me. Exile — forced, self-adopted or incidental — is banishment from your context. Almost a liminal space, where you suddenly know no belonging.

In the discourses of diaspora, the exiles are a marginal story. For a middle-income country like Pakistan, the “diaspora” is a source of remittance, a vehicle of transferring jobs, knowledge, and skills. The exile is an odd feature of the story — a continuous affront to the nationalistic pride, contrary to the “image” that states want to project and diplomats to peddle.

For decades now, a good number of Pakistanis have lived in such a state of being. Under the various military regimes — especially in the 1960s, 1980s and 2000s — several political activists, writers and even high-profile politicians had to be away from their countries.

Intellectuals such as Professor Fazalur Rahman and Daud Rahbar, who were the rationalists that our society needed, spent their lives in academia abroad. Their works are cited globally but have limited or virtually no traction within Pakistan.

Similarly, Tariq Ali — the flamboyant leftist of the 1960s — is a voice for the global Left movements, save for his own place of birth. The examples are countless and varied. Yet the common theme is exclusion, loss, and purging of a society that needs only a certain type of scholar, artist, and activist.

Dr. Javed Ghamidi — Pakistan’s best-known rationalist Islamic scholar — has been living in Malaysia for the past five years. Ghamidi’s work is hugely influential and has the potential to reshape the private and public manifestations of faith in Pakistan. However, he escaped a few suicide bombers who were nabbed just in time; his close associates were killed or attacked. I met him in Maryland a few weeks ago and his view was clear: The “moral pressure,” as he put it, of endangering others keeps him away from Pakistan.

This resonated with me as I witnessed precious human life atrophy in front of me last March. What scares me is precisely this nightmare: of meditated or accidental harm to another human being on my account.

No other Pakistani exile is under global spotlight like the brave teenager Malala Yousafzai, who lives in the United Kingdom with her family. The awards, accolades, and inspiration across the globe are not enough to assure that Malala would not be targeted if and when she returns to Pakistan. This is the ultimate paradox of being a Pakistani in the 21st century. You are brave, modern and prepared to take risks, but the state may not protect you.

After my escape and subsequent travel to the United States in April 2014 to be with my family, another Pakistani writer and publisher, Muhammad Shoaib Adil, fled Lahore in July. Adil's magazine, *Naya Zamana* (*New Age*), was Pakistan's only fearlessly liberal publication in Urdu. In Pakistan, we worked together on many stories, and *Naya Zamana* reported the unspeakable issues. Adil was harassed and taken to a police station for having committed blasphemy for serializing a book authored by an Ahmadi (member of persecuted Ahmadiyya community apostatized by hardline clerics) judge, along with other bold topics he covered.

The words "bold" and "brave" in Pakistan's context imply what in other societies may be considered a call of conscience. The June 2014 issue of *Naya Zamana*, as Adil mentioned in an interview, highlighted the murder of Rashid Rehman, a human rights lawyer who was killed for defending Junaid Hafeez, a young scholar jailed for blasphemy. Afterwards, Adil said he received calls warning him of "dire consequences." For months, he was in hiding. Since his arrival in the U.S., the hard copy of the magazine has shut down. Now an electronic version has been restarted.

Life, as they say, goes on.

Several other Pakistani writers live in exile. Hasan Mujtaba, a poet and a columnist, struggles in New York to meet ends. Khawar Rizvi, in Washington, D.C., is another journalist who was picked up by the authorities and left the country nearly eight years ago. All of them meet up, talk about Pakistan, write, opine, and speak, but their uprootedness is palpable.

The friends-in-exile list grows. I have met Iranians, Arabs, and Latin Americans who have faced similar situations. But a Pakistani immediately becomes part of your story. Professor Shemeem Akhtar, author of several books, teaches at State University of New York, Purchase College. When I met her in August, she narrated how in 1998, Islamic clerics at Allama Iqbal Open University, where she taught then, brought charges of blasphemy, among others, against her. Akhtar feared vigilante attacks by extremists, suffered a hostile work environment, and lived under threats. She had to escape.

And what do people do in exile? Not all are fortunate. A young journalist from Sindh, Kashif Sarmad, currently in Texas, works at a gas station and wants to re-enter journalism. Asif Magsi from Baluchistan, also living in the U.S., is finding ways to survive. He told me that threats still come his way via Twitter, Facebook, and unwanted emails.

If you continue your work as an exile, then you face a barrage of mail and opprobrium. A senior official reportedly told someone that I staged the attack on myself to obtain immigration. Twitter accounts linked to Islamic extremists remind me that I am not forgotten and I should watch out. The jingoist social media teams are quick to call me a traitor for speaking my mind while "living abroad." I am planning to write a cookbook now and if the logistics work out, perhaps start a cooking show on TV. That is the most "positive" communication I can think of.

Before I polish my culinary skills, in my bid to do something “safe,” I recently joined Ithaca College as a scholar in residence. One of the first persons I met here was Professor Asma Barlas, who left Pakistan in the 1980s after she was persecuted for her opinions. While in the Foreign Service, Barlas was charge-sheeted (indicted) and dismissed for calling General Zia ul Haq a buffoon in her private diary and for making critical remarks against the judges subservient to the military regime. Later, she joined the *Daily Muslim* and her critical editorials got her into trouble. She fled Pakistan, rebuilt her life, and now teaches at Ithaca College.

All I could think of is how Pakistan lost another exceptional mind. Other than the voluntary “brain drain,” Pakistan also needs to remember those who wanted to but could not stay home.

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“I Know How Men in Exile Feed on Dreams”

Our native soil draws all of us, by I know not what sweetness, and never allows us to forget.

— Ovid

I sat there, on a wooden deck, with a motley crew under the summer sky. Deep in the suburbia of Maryland, this was a spontaneous get-together with a diverse group of Pakistani-Americans — the sorted, integrated types not at odds with the “evil West” as we know it back home. Yet they were exiles, dislocated in their own way. This was a strangely intimate evening with so many stories that merged into a moment of connection, a nameless bond.

Noreen and Amjad Babar — old residents here — are great hosts. Their home, an open house in all senses, hosts all the progressives across the length and breadth of the United States. That evening when we all congregated by chance, it was a melee of writers, poets, doctors, and journalists of Pakistani origin. This was also the weekend when the Association of Physicians of Pakistani Descent of North America (APPNA) was holding its annual convention.

Pakistani-American doctors organize a huge festival every year where they congregate, network, vent, and even make matches for their hybridized children.

I was invited to speak at a panel organized by Karachi’s Dow Medical College Alumni (formally known as the Dow Graduates Association of North America), which attempts to raise the unpopular issues of extremism and progressive change in Pakistan. This year’s event was dedicated to the hundreds of doctors who have been killed for their “wrong” faith in Pakistan. Most notably, Dr. Mehdi, whose assassination did not even invite a simple statement of condemnation from Pakistan’s so-called ruling “democrats.” The panel was great: Pakistan’s former ambassador to the U.S., Husain Haqqani; poet-writer-journalist Hasan Mujtaba; and the bold columnist Dr. Muhammad Taqi. Haqqani amused the audience with his wit and exceptional command over Pakistan’s history. Only a few bilingual speakers can match his erudition.

So after the event, we all gathered around a table on a perfect summer afternoon, and gradually a dozen of us had banded together.

Writer and poet Neelam Ahmad Bashir, who was visiting Washington, D.C., had come earlier in the day to attend the Mushaira organized by APPNA and to read her stories at what is rather affectionately termed the Society of Urdu Literature (SOUL). The firebrand physician-activist turned politician Amna Buttar was there, as well as Masood Haider, a veteran journalist from New York. We all moved to Amjad Babar's house, huddled in cars in *desi* (native South Asian) style, oblivious of time and busy cracking pleasant and morbid jokes about the state of the dear homeland.

When we arrived at the Babar residence, we were joined by another fine poet, Irfan Malik, and Ijaz Shah, who used to work for the old-school progressive magazine *Viewpoint* (and left Pakistan during the Zia era), among others. I wanted Neelam Bashir to recite her new poem on *bhai* (brother) Columbus — a hysterically funny satire on America and Pakistani-Americans, which I had heard at the SOUL event a day earlier — but she was in a different sort of a mood. As if charged by the *mehfil* (gathering), she started to sing.

Starting with Madam Noor Jahan's "*Ja Apni Hasraton Pe Aansoo Baha ke So Ja*," Neelam was unstoppable. When she came to the best-known *ghazal* of Munir Niazi — "*Uss bewafa ka sheher haye aur ham hayn dosto*" — the evening turned molten. Everybody joined in as if this were a group catharsis. Niazi's *ghazal* is wistful, nostalgic and utterly sad:

*ye ajnabi si manzilen aur raftagan ki yad
tanhaiyon ka zahar hai aur ham hain dosto*

(These strange destinations and the memory
of lost companions

The poison of loneliness is what we live
with, dear friends)

*Aankon mein urr rahi lutti mehfilon ki dhool
Ibrat sarai-deher hai, aur ham hayn dosto*

(The dust of abandoned congregations hurts
the eye We exist with the repentance from a
ruined *serai* (tavern) of life)

Amna Buttar followed with her repertoire of *ghazals* and folk songs. Singing in Punjabi, Urdu and Seriaki, she transformed into another person. That was my true discovery of the evening. Buttar had left her successful medicine career to join politics and was elected as a member of Punjab Assembly — until the xenophobic campaign against dual nationals was launched during the Pakistan Peoples Party government, joined by the "free" and "independent" media and judges. In short, Pakistan spurned her effort to make a contribution. She is now back in the U.S. as an accomplished medical professional and

continues her activism. But this is a loss for her country.

Dr. Muhammad Taqi knew almost every verse of the *ghazals* (rhymed poems) and *geets* (songs) and displayed a remarkable knowledge of Indian cinema music. On the sidelines of this music-fest, Taqi and Aijaz Shah also discovered that they were neighbors from the old city of Peshawar and continued to refresh their spatial and cultural memory. And then came a post-mortem of the Left movement. They spent an hour comparing notes on who had contributed to or betrayed the Left. While they were at it, Masood and I could not help laughing, and I jokingly referred to this history digging as a tribute to the shrine of the Left that still remains alive in the consciousness of many progressive Pakistanis. Every now and then, comrades and commissars are remembered, anecdotes exchanged with splashes of theoretical tidbits to understand why Pakistan, once fertile ground for progressive politics, has become a graveyard of ideology — except the one sanctioned by the martial state.

The singing was only interrupted by a *desi* spread — mostly home-cooked. Upon my insistence, the poetry session started in the early hours of the morning. The clear, deep-blue starry sky and a soft breeze made it a unique setting for the recital. Irfan Malik is an accomplished Punjabi poet, and I was a little upset at myself for not having read him extensively or, for that matter, other contemporary Punjabi poets. A poem called “Pakistan” haunted everyone for its stark images and powerful impact.

The darkened lane
Has pierced deep into the hearts In polythene
bags
Lives
Stuffed like refuse The demons of blood
Adrift on old rivers
Lives, trampled like rubble

On the *chowks* (crossroads) of my land
In the dips of lanes defined faith and belief
In the potholes of pavements marked by
patriotism Hands, feet, eyes, tongues, breasts
All deceiving the hearts
The dark lane has jammed into our throats
Like a poisonous lizard
The darkened lane Was always dark

(translation by Raza Rumi)

Irfan Malik, a *pucca* (authentic) Lahori, lives in Boston and teaches and practices theatre. His Punjabi accent is quintessentially Lahori, where *r*'s are pronounced with a hint of *d* and vice versa. Another remarkable poem also deals with the intractability of exile:

I search for my home in your house From my
own back
There is no hope of this exile ending What
grave is this?
How could I bury the union? Helpless
waiting, giving up. What kind of a calamity is
this? The absence of separation
Is more luscious than love (translation by
Raza Rumi)

Butitwas Hasan Mujtaba, a poet of original expression from Sindh, who also writes for the BBC, who enthralled everyone with his poem "*Sab kujj vikda*" ("Everything is for sale"). With a poetic expression to transcend linguistic boundaries, Mujtaba only echoes the Sindhi masters, who knew the languages of the soil. When the progeny of great Punjabi poet Amrita Pritam put up her house for sale — a unique venue where Amrita and her lover Imroz lived and worked and where the poet Sahir Ludhianvi visited — Mujtaba was moved immensely. He composed a long poem invoking multiple metaphors from Punjabi Sufi poetry and folk tradition, lamenting how every value and reference in our times was a victim of greed. And the poem was a scathing attack on devaluing our heritage by a society adrift, by a people who had lost direction.

O' Waris Shah (a classic Punjabi poet) What
all is sold
In the marketplace Graves are sold Friends
get auctioned,
Each leaf of love's book

And promises, assurances are traded O'
Waris Shah.

Mujtaba's poem, "Exilic Experience on the Streets of NYC," is a universal song of separation:

Exile Oh!
You mean Suicide's stepsister
The poet's beloved...
Exile is not even Broadway
Where drama runs, night after night, week
after week, Month after month
Main attraction of the children and the tourists
The Lion King!
Exile is not even the mayor of NYC. Exile is
like an old newspaper
On the streets of the city in autumn Trying to
walk
With the flying dried maple leaves. Exile is a
gush of wind Accompanying a torrential
storm.

(translation by Zafaryab Ahmed)

I sat there under the open sky and marveled at the ability of these men and women to poeticize exile, to celebrate separations in such a manner. My own liminal state of being fitted into the collective mood. Having left my home, my land and people — even though not forever — I felt this as the ultimate, cathartic moment. Wajid Ali Syed, my old friend and a longtime journalist, kept filling in the forgotten lyric or verse and amusing with his timely interventions.

But the personal stories intersected that night. Neelum Ahmad Bashir had lived in the U.S. for decades as an exile, unhappily married to a man who thought reading and writing was almost a sinful act. She now divides her time between Pakistan and the U.S. Two other friends, journalist Khawar Rizvi (who escaped after life threats) and Hamza, a human rights activist, also sat there and found their own story narrated through poetry.

And saddest was the fact that that our host, Amjad Babar, is battling cancer with an amazing will to live every day of his life in a fulfilling manner. So the parties and *mehfils* (gatherings) at his place have become even more regular. Such a confluence of personal histories made this evening far more than a regular music and poetry soiree. At Babar's house, the late intellectual journalist Khalid Hasan was also an occasional visitor. We

talked about him, as Washington, D.C., remembers him well. There was many an anecdote about his dress sense; his impeccable English, Urdu and Punjabi; his eccentricities; and vast knowledge of everything cultural.

At the end of a long bright night, Neelum cheered everyone with her long poem:

Now that we have grown older
Fearing that the daughter may find a boyfriend
And the son might marry a white or a black
girl We have grown a beard, and donned a
burqa
Oh *bhai* Columbus, thanks for discovering
America Now we attend sermons and
frequent mosques
After making lots of money, we shall visit
Makkah many a time
Will live in Amreeka and still call it infidel
And consider our faith as the very best After
a sinful life, we are now repenting
Oh *bhai* Columbus, thanks for discovering
Amreeka. (translation by Raza Rumi)

I have travelled across continents. This is not the first time I am living abroad, but a forced departure is cruel. I can't complain too much. The U.S. and especially its multicultural capital are not a closed society. There is a level of acceptability for outsiders. But the idea of being an outsider is what makes it complex. How long will this be? I wish I knew.

All is true, my friend But life must be Lived,
endured.
An arrow, stretched On the bow-string Awaits its
prey
But the deer must Leap and play.

(Majeed Amjad, translation by Yasmeen Hameed)

In Pakistan, “Blasphemers” Like Me Militant “Justice”

Pakistan has acquired a strong reputation of imprisoning a large number of men and women accused of “blasphemy.” Far from a fair trial, most of the accused are not even safe from mobs and vigilantes, who assume the powers of both judge and jury. For a country that is ostensibly governed by a written constitution, this is extremely worrying. More so when the state as an arbiter of human rights is silent or even complicit in such human rights abuses.

The latest victim of the zealots’ ire is Mohammed Asghar, a 70-year-old man who also happens to be mentally ill. It is not surprising that there are some in Pakistan who want to see him dead. Asghar has been sentenced to death for blasphemy for various acts which, given his mental condition, he may not be aware of.

Asghar was formally sentenced to death in 2014. Despite his diagnosis in the U.K. of suffering from paranoid schizophrenia, the court chose to declare that he was competent to stand trial. However, late last month, a prison guard driven by self-styled zealotry burst into Asghar’s cell and shot him in the back. The guard fired a second shot, narrowly missing. Restrained by others, the assailant nevertheless managed to get a good kick in as Asghar was taken to the hospital. Eyewitnesses have revealed that the guard chanted, “Death to the blasphemer!” as he swung his boot at the old man.

Asghar, I am told, is on the road to physical recovery. Nonetheless, I do not rate very highly his chances of surviving. Prison officials briefed the media that Asghar would return this week to the same prison where he was lynched and almost died. Also being held in that same prison is Zaffar Bhatti, a Christian pastor who has been on trial for blasphemy since 2012 and whose life is also in danger.

For me, all of this is rather personal. In March 2014, I was targeted in a cold-blooded assassination attempt. My views on the persecution of minorities and my opposition to the interpretations of Islam by extremists were not acceptable to the armed militias, and they used violence to try to silence me. A few assassins shot at least a dozen bullets at my car. I was lucky enough to be able to duck under the car, where I lay motionless, pretending I was dead. My driver, Mustafa, was not as lucky and was brutally killed in the attack. A human life was lost and another fellow traveler in the ambushed car was seriously injured. Asghar’s plight is mine too. Beyond the threat of violence, militants receive impunity for their crimes, and the state refuses to protect their victims. I was fortunate to survive, but hundreds of Pakistanis have been targeted by ideologues who think the world has to be purified of those who are “infidels,” “blasphemers,” or their “sympathizers.”

The only thing necessary for evil to succeed in the world — said a wiser person

than me — is for us to remain silent. For this reason, even though I do not know Mohammed Asghar, and I may never meet him, it would be wrong for me to remain silent today.

The government of Pakistan is running scared of extremists. There is good reason — I am just one of several people whose deaths were meant to promote a skewed interpretation of Islam. In 2011, the world witnessed how Punjab Governor Salmaan Taseer was shot by his own guard for opposing the misuse of the blasphemy law. Other victims have been burnt alive. A Christian minister was gunned down later and another politician was hounded in the courts for having the gall to question the very questionable blasphemy laws on television! Earlier this year, a lawyer was killed for taking up the case of a bright young man languishing in jail due to allegations of blasphemy. Deaths in prisons have occurred with no accountability or punishment.

And yet, if politicians, policymakers, judges and lawyers tremble in fear, we may as well surrender our birthright to those who would deny us it. This culture of fear, orchestrated by powerful clerics and frenzied mobs, has paralyzed the criminal justice system. Those enjoying positions of power appear helpless. And there is no counter-narrative to oppose the spread of extremist ideology. At least three generations since the era of Pakistan's Islamist dictator General Zia ul Haq's rule (1977-1988) have been indoctrinated to accept violence in the name of religion as legitimate.

It is the duty of Pakistan's parliament to put a stop to this madness. It should begin by initiating a debate about the growing number of blasphemy cases in the country and how the legal provisions are being abused to settle personal scores. It is ironic that witch-hunting is carried out in the name of a faith that promotes peace and equality among human beings.

Pakistan is fighting an ideological battle against itself. In 1947, it was created to safeguard the economic and political rights of the Muslim minority. In his first policy speech as the country's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah assured Pakistanis that their state would not have a religious preference. But the course adopted by successive military and elected regimes betrayed Jinnah's ideal. Over time, the state has chosen to decide who is a Muslim and who is not, has displayed an unequal acknowledgment of citizen rights, and has enabled ungoverned spaces spelling chaos. Tackling the discriminatory laws may be the first step to restoring the kind of sane society we have a responsibility to bequeath to the next generation.

Mohammad Asghar, wounded at the hands of a state official, represents all that has gone wrong in Pakistan. It must be corrected immediately. Releasing an infirm elderly person would be the right way to start what will be a long journey to saving Pakistan's failing legal and social systems.

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Climate of Intolerance: Down the Well of Religious Bigotry

India is showing a worrying trend of taking the same path of religious exclusivism as Pakistan did — and is suffering the consequences.

India's robust and rather polarized debate on "intolerance" — a euphemism for the rising clamor from Hindu nationalist extremists — is worrying for the region as a whole. For decades, India provided the "secular" model for Pakistan, Bangladesh, and other postcolonial countries in South Asia. Progressives in Pakistan cited its pluralist past and secular constitution as a benchmark to which their country should aspire.

The subcontinental variety of secularism emanates from a centuries-old tradition of coexistence. This is altogether different from the European idea of secularism, where faith is completely in the private sphere. This is why the Islamists in South Asia have interpreted secularism as *ladeeniat* (*sans* religion or anti-religion). Seen as a western import, it was considered to be against the comprehensive solution that Islam provided for everyone. Since Pakistan was created for Muslims and its identity over time turned explicitly "Islamic," secularism became an abuse-word. And remains so.

During the Independence movement of the 1940s, the Islamic groups and the Muslim League represented the two divergent trends among Muslims. Muhammad Ali Jinnah attempted to identify the divide within Muslims, and therefore the Muslim League viewed itself as representative of modern Muslims and wanted to free the community from the *maulvis* and *themaulan*s (clerics). This is why Jinnah was called *Kafir-e-Azam* (great infidel) and Pakistan was termed as *Na-Pakistan* (impure) by the Islamists. Yet the idea of religion shaping nationhood unleashed a genie, and by 1949, a year after Jinnah died, Pakistan had adopted the Objectives Resolution that called for the supremacy of divine laws. The Objectives Resolution is the pre- amble of the Pakistani Constitution. It was declared to be an operative part of the country's supreme law by the country's highest court.

By 1974, Pakistan had adopted religious exclusion as a legal tenet by declaring the Ahmaddiya sect as non-Muslim through a constitutional amendment. A process of Islamization started, ironically under a secular ruler, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. But it culminated during the decade of the 1980s under the military rule of General Zia ul Haq.

The Zia era (1977-1988) institutionalized bigotry and changed the social landscape of Pakistan. I was in middle school when Arabic was enforced as a compulsory subject. In seventh grade, we were told about the merits of knowing Arabic. As children in Muslim households, we also read the Holy Quran through private tutors — usually local mosque leaders, and two lessons in Arabic every day seemed rather excessive. But this was a choice, an identity path that the country was taking. Religion crept into all our textbooks slowly — from sciences to language studies.

Today, as we read the news emanating from our secular neighbor, there are disturbingly familiar signs of that same religious exclusivism and its public assertion. The Culture Minister of India intends to incorporate the Hindu epics such as the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and *Bhagavad Gita* in school and college curricula to cleanse India of "cultural pollution."

Earlier, there was an intense debate on introducing Sanskrit in India's schools. Tamil-speaking people said that their language was older. The idea was dropped, but its provenance is instructive. "Local" Sanskrit cannot be equated with a "foreign" Arabic, but the embedded religiosity is evident.

In his bid to Islamize Pakistan, Zia set up enforcement of *namaz* (Muslim prayer) committees in every public office. These official notifications still exist, though their implementation has dwindled over time. When I saw Yoga Day celebrated domestically and globally, I could not help drawing a comparison. Admittedly, yoga has acquired a global stature as a meditative and healthy act, but its projection was couched in religious symbolism and a call to an imagined glorious past — not too dissimilar from what Muslim extremists say about our glory in the world and the Indian subcontinent.

References to ancient, mythical India having invented spaceships, plastic surgery, and television broadcasting also seemed too close for comfort. In the 1980s, Islamic or Quranic science was given state patronage in Pakistan, and conferences were held where so-called scientists proposed methods to solve power issues using the energy of *jinns* (otherworldly creatures mentioned in the Quran). Pakistan's best-known rationalist, Pervez Hoodbhoy, has documented these aberrations in detail. But what was the net effect? Study of sciences declined, research nosedived, and today universities attract large crowds on sessions that narrate the power of *jinns*.

The rise of religious nationalist demagoguery is not limited to the subcontinent. American televangelists have been studied in detail. And in other phases of our medieval history, such discourses have been common. During the 1980s, Pakistan also saw the rise of clerics on national television, radio and the newspapers. They were given state patronage and public space to inform opinion. Today this creed — bearded and unbearded — rationalizes extremism. Until the Pakistan Army stepped in last year, they were major defenders of the Taliban and their affiliates.

Two generations of Pakistanis have grown up on this diet of mythology, conspiracy theories, and defense of the indefensible. The conspiracy theories were reinforced through the pruning of textbooks, aligning them to state policy of *jihad* (struggle against evil) and obliterating the remnants of shared culture and symbols. The Indus Valley civilization is no longer a major part of the syllabus, nor do children read about the edicts of Asoka, which still dot the physical heritage of Pakistan's northwest.

So, too, when I read about the government of Rajasthan attempting to cleanse textbooks of Urdu or Muslim references (including the agnostic and secular Ismat Chughtai), I experienced a dismaying sense of *déjàvu*. All such acts in my country have had long-term consequences. In Gujarat, reports tell us, students are being taught that stem cell technology was found in the *Mahabharata*. Or that automobile technology existed in India's *Vedic* times. Books written by an ideologue named Dina Nath Batra, whose qualifications are unclear, have been introduced in thousands of schools. Batra's claim to fame has been to get American scholar Wendy Doniger's book, *The Hindus: An Alternative History*, banned in India. The word is that other states such as Haryana are following suit.

This is the climate in which the discussions of banning beef have arisen. Under the Zia regime, laws asserted the majoritarian Islamic tenets of Sunni Muslims. When Zia imposed *zakat* (a mandatory deduction from annual income), the Shia Muslims protested and the regime had to withdraw its decision. Other so-called *Sharia*-based laws were also

enforced without taking into account the diversity of Muslims who live in Pakistan. So, too, in India, there are many (a large, large number) Hindus who are not averse to eating beef or letting others eat it. The theological debate is a waste of time, but blanket impositions become a dividing line.

One such dividing line has been the blasphemy law in Pakistan. Again, the Zia regime tinkered with the law, and by 1990 the death penalty was introduced. Now it hounds Muslims and non-Muslims alike — though the latter get a disproportionate share of the persecution. Having long been dismayed by the lynching of non-Muslim Pakistanis for “blasphemy” against Islam, I now find it disturbing to see Indian Muslims being killed for blasphemy against Hinduism— eating beef.

In Uttar Pradesh, Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) legislators brazenly justified the Dadri lynching, and an office-bearer of the party asked for the charges to be reduced from murder to culpable homicide. Others were told if they want to eat beef they should go to Pakistan. Stars like Shahrukh Khan and icons of our times such as Gulzar have been rebuked and called unpatriotic for simply challenging the extremist ideas.

This is exactly what Pakistani liberals have faced: being charged with treason for speaking up. Religious nationalism turns into patriotism and dissent is branded a crime against state and society.

Attacks on writers, academics, and public intellectuals in India increase as the nationalist fringe gains ground. One is not too worried about the Modi-led BJP. It has to govern and get re-elected, so pragmatism is likely to prevail. But its support base includes radical elements that have targeted eminent writers. For instance, charges have not been framed against those who killed Narendra Dabholkar in 2013, or Govind Pansare, who was murdered eight months ago. The more recent and chilling death of a rationalist, M. M. Kalburgi, suggests that such killings may continue.

In recent murders, the suspects are members of Hindu extremist groups. In the U.S., I have admired Gandhi’s statues in Washington, D.C., and New York. Seeing a statue of his killer being raised now in India makes me intensely worried. It has to do with the distortion of history and condoning wanton violence. This path is known to be fraught with peril — perhaps ending in anarchy.

Fortunately, India’s democratic traditions are stronger than Pakistan’s. The reaction of writers, intellectuals, and even sections of the media has been inspirational in countering the extreme narratives of nationalism. This battle cannot be lost.

Pakistan has had to undergo internal rifts, fissures, and thousands of deaths at the hands of terrorists before a change in its course took place. Even now it is a slow, fractured process. This is why India must avoid the same path at all costs. On social media, instances of extremism in Pakistan are cited to prove India’s superiority in *faux* nationalist rhetoric. Why should Indians compare themselves to Pakistan, which has weaker democratic institutions and a different trajectory? It is not the benchmark to compare with. Smug “we are better-off-than-Pakistan” assertions are not enough when the fringe elements are growing in size and threatening to acquire mainstream status.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi would be best served by arresting such trends so that he can fulfill his mandate of economic progress. Given the presence of “Pakistan” as a negative reference in hyper-nationalistic rhetoric, why is India hell-bent on following in its footsteps?

In fact, as I write these lines, I am aware that many Pakistanis will call me a traitor for berating my country, and the Indian right wing will attack me for daring to write about their *mahaan* (great) Hindu civilization. The last time I wrote something critical about the Indian right wing, I was called an Inter Services Intelligence (Pakistan's premier spy agency) agent by a bunch of conspiracy theorists. Some of my compatriots, after reading this criticism, will likely label me a Research and Analysis Wing (India's key intelligence agency) agent.

Such are the wages of intolerance, masked as “nationalism” and predicated on notions of religious supremacy and doctored histories.

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A Brutal Murder in Bangladesh

The brutal, cowardly murder of freethinker Avijit Roy on the streets of Dhaka is a reflection of embedded intolerance in many Muslim societies. Bangladesh, despite its secular credentials, is no exception.

On February 26, 2015, Roy was hacked to death by extremists with machetes, while his unfortunate wife, Rafida Bonya Ahmed, was also injured. What's even more shocking was the fact that a good number of people witnessed the crime but did not intervene. Many were taping the violence on cellphones. Worse, according to media reports, the attack took place near a police checkpoint erected for traffic control.

This incident left me deeply disturbed. As I was also subjected to (missed) bullets in 2014, Roy's murder brought back memories of my close brush with death, subsequent exile and the fear of returning to my own country, Pakistan. As with Roy and many others, Islamist extremists found my views unacceptable to the extent that physical elimination was the only answer. I miraculously escaped the assassination attempt, but my driver was killed and another companion was injured.

While a few gunmen were arrested, the trial lingers on. But I know from my experience as an analyst, Pakistani courts seldom punish attackers, and the masterminds are never apprehended or brought to book.

I had never met Roy, but I was aware of his powerful work. It is not easy to profess atheism when you belong to a Muslim country. Roy lived in the United States and ran a blog called *Mukto Mona (Free Mind)*, and he was vocal in opposing religious bigotry and intolerance. While he remained in the relatively safer climes of the U.S., he was still part of the discourse in Bangladesh, and this is why he was a threat to Islamist extremists.

He received regular threats on social media — an irony of the ostensibly postmodern 21st century. The online store that sold Roy's books was also harassed, and later it stopped displaying them altogether. In 2014, an Islamist said that Roy would be killed when he returned to his native country.

So the doomed blogger had gone back to Bangladesh for his book promotion when extremists found the right opportunity to attack and kill him. His latest book, *Bishwasher Virus (The Virus of Faith)*, says it all.

One can disagree with the approach that some atheists take to matters of faith, but it is utterly disconcerting to note that the space for such ideas is shrinking in Muslim countries. And Bangladesh is no Saudi Arabia or even Pakistan. Its liberation in 1971 from Pakistan was an act of defiance to preserve the political and cultural rights that the so-called Islamic Republic of Pakistan was trying to suppress. For Bangladesh to become more like Pakistan is even more tragic.

In addition to *Bishwasher Virus*, Roy was also promoting his book, *Shunno Theke Moha Bishwo (From Vacuum to Universe)*, at the Immortal Book Fair held each year in late February. The date of the festival coincides with an important period of Bangladesh's secular history, when students were killed by security forces for demanding equal rights for the Bengali language. At that time, Pakistan had tried to impose Urdu as a national language on East Pakistan, which later became Bangladesh in the war of 1971.

Four days after the murder, Bangladeshi authorities arrested a radical Islamist named Farabi Shafiur Rahman, who had threatened Roy on Facebook. The country's elite Rapid Action Battalion said that Rahman was affiliated with the banned pan-Islamist outfit Hizb ut- Tahrir. According to police, Rahman had written: "Avijit Roy lives in America. So it's not possible to kill him at this moment. But when he'll return to the country, he'll be murdered."

Earlier, in February 2013, Rajib Haidar, another secular writer and blogger, was murdered near Shahbagh, where thousands of Bangladeshis were protesting to punish the individuals who were involved in war crimes during the 1971 conflict. Like Haidar, Roy campaigned for the punishment of all those accused.

Rahman was arrested in 2013 when he threatened a cleric for leading the funeral rites of the slain Haidar. Consistent with the way the criminal justice system works in South Asia, Rahman was released on bail in August of that year.

February is perhaps the cruelest of months for Bangladesh. In February 2004, a professor of Dhaka University, Humayun Azad, was attacked after attending the same book fair as Roy. Luckily, Azad didn't die. However, he later died in Germany during a professional trip. His death remains a mystery.

The enduring fault line in Bangladesh since its independence has to do with the existence of Islamist groups such as Jamaat-e-Islami, which opposed the creation of the country and found greater political space due to its alliance with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, the main opposition outfit. Both these parties boycotted the 2014 elections and therefore are excluded from the current system of governance.

But there are other, softer versions of Islamism that are rising in Bangladesh. For instance, the Tablighi Jamaat has found major traction in society. As in other Muslim countries, Islamist ideas are appealing to the younger segments of the population.

For decades, Bangladeshi governments, like their nemesis in Pakistan, have appeased religious passions. A clear case is that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina covers her head. There is no Quranic injunction for women to wear a *hijab* (headscarf). This was true for Pakistan's slain prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, who also demonstrated similar acquiescence to religious fervor not only by covering her head but also carrying Islamic rosary beads to prove piety and credentials of being a devout Muslim.

Media freedoms have also been under threat as the incumbent Bangladeshi government has, on occasions, tried to muzzle critical commentaries on elections and the democratic evolution. But surely the religious opposition to freethinking remains the most serious challenge, leading many to leave the country and not return. Taslima Nasreen, a writer, has been in exile for decades, scared of the radicals back home. Ironically, she is blamed for being too "extreme" in her views.

I had always admired Bangladesh as a secular nation and even wrote about its cultural and intellectual space. Sadly, it is only following the country it left behind in 1971: Pakistan. But when it comes to religious bigotry, few Muslim countries are safe for writers, bloggers, and those who challenge extremist interpretations of Islam.

I am afraid of returning home to Pakistan. I was lucky to have narrowly escaped the fate of Roy and perhaps will not be as fortunate next time. The Taliban affiliates that tried to kill me number in the thousands, are well organized, and entrenched. Their level of intolerance is such that I am not even an atheist, yet I am a target.

I mourn Roy's loss and also lament the state of exile that pernicious extremist ideologies have forced me into.

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Reclaiming One's Voice

A few months back, I had to leave my country simply to ensure that I would not be left dead. The price of public positions is hard. Perhaps I had ruffled too many feathers or was simply unlucky to have caught the attention of those who tried to kill me. I am trying to make sense of things that may have fallen apart for me. But have they? I keep trying at making sense of my country, the one I belong to and the one I love immensely.

Nuclearstate. An Islamic Republic. A failed state? Endless labels and categories have been accorded to what Pakistan represents today to the world at large. Some facts speak for themselves, but perceptions are deceptive as they start morphing into realities. Pakistan is also a resilient country and inspires me to fight the odds, the demons that have to be defeated, and the endless list of things that need to be done.

Contrary to what most diagnose, Pakistan's trajectory was not inevitable. The country's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah — almost a demonic figure in India — attempted to set a direction in his August 11, 1947, speech by recognizing that religion can mobilize people and politics but cannot be an instrument for governance. "We are starting with this fundamental principle," said Jinnah, "that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one State." The famous words followed: "...in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State." Critics say it was too late. Others think this was the only way to shape statecraft when a new state had come into being. Perhaps all of this is irrelevant now. Sixty-seven years later, Pakistan is hardly the country it was, geographically or otherwise, in 1947.

A few months ago, a bureaucrat and noted Urdu columnist said Jinnah never made such a speech and there was no evidence of its existence. There was a major controversy and many of us lamented how history continues to be distorted. But it might be instructive to remember that a bureaucrat tried censoring that historic speech. A press advisory was issued, reportedly, that papers should not quote Jinnah's secular remarks as they might jeopardize the case for a new state.

Not much has changed since then. And this is where the problem lies.

Not just in Pakistan — in postcolonial states across the region, unaccountable "servants" of the state continue to define public good, measures of patriotism, and that ephemeral, rhetorical "national interest." The singular failure of Pakistan's successive rulers — civil- military and hybrid — has been to continue with the steel frame of the Raj. At the epicenter of this arrangement was the military. Scholars have used many frameworks to define the Pakistani state. Terms like "pretorian," "garrison state," and "deep state" are common ways to describe the country, its ethos, and centers of power. All of these labels apply in their own limited ways, but the bottom line is that the relationship between the citizen and the state is a troubled one. In fact, it has broken down.

Not unlike the rest of South Asia, Pakistan is in desperate need of reform. Its archaic laws, regulations drafted by the colonialists, need to change. And above all, the

mighty civil-military bureaucracy must be answerable to people. But this reform is equally important for the political parties, the electoral system, the functioning of the Parliament and other democratic institutions. This is why there is a large number of Pakistanis disillusioned by an imperfect, extractive democracy where a club of regional, tribal, and business elites runs the show.

The other day I was asked by a researcher on the sources of instability in Pakistan. The curse of geography and history both came to mind. Geopolitics and fears of the neighborhood drive a security state, and the security state needs a well-oiled, powerful military machine that has to be in the driving seat lest the “corrupt” and “incompetent” politicians take over. These are views not restricted to Pakistan. In Bangladesh and India, similar views can be heard from the affluent and the educated — who form, lobby, and negotiate for their share in governance. But Pakistan will have to undo its past — the legacy of unaccountable, authoritarian regimes — in order to serve its restive population.

Unofficial estimates suggest that the country is now inhabited by over 200 million people. It is also a young country, where the overwhelming majority of the population is below the age of thirty. Each year, millions of jobs and livelihoods need to be generated. The informal economy is as big as the formal, if not larger, and it keeps the country going. Pakistanis abroad send huge amounts of foreign exchange to their families that in large measure feed the consumerism apparent in many cities and towns. So the official estimates and numbers may present an inaccurate and alarming picture. This is the paradox that makes it difficult to understand the burgeoning, vibrant polity.

Overemphasis on global and regional “security,” war, and the intelligence apparatus has dehumanized the imagination of Pakistan. The few thousand militants, lethal that they are, are often mistaken for the millions who want to earn a livelihood and lead a regular life. A carefully constructed religio-nationalist “ideology” — employing xenophobia and paranoia — strangulates the potential of Pakistan. Sadly, this has also been popularized by mainstream political parties that are products as well as perpetrators of an ideological mindset.

What is this ideology after all? In its bid for nation-building, the civil-military bureaucracy complex — the one audacious enough to censor Jinnah — used Islamic nationalism as a tool for “unity” and termed all divergent views and dissent as unpatriotic. That design is now a reality. The education system, mainstream media, and popular literature all peddle the path that a small group of men chose for the country. Even the Raj chronicler Philip Mason’s account of men who ruled India would appear boring compared to the men who have ruled post-1947 Pakistan.

The surprising part — again a paradox — is that despite the massive social and cultural engineering through the decades, the Pakistani spirit refuses to digest this ideological diet. Dissenters, traitors and blasphemers abound. A friend of mine, Muhammad Shoaib Adil, has been editing and publishing a liberal monthly in Urdu called *Naya Zamana* (*The New Age*) for the past fourteen years. It is a separate matter that he is being chased by the zealots who want him to be booked for blasphemy.

Naya Zamana has taken bold positions on religion and ideology while the country was being Talibanized. Adil is under threat and has gone underground. I am worried for him but also proud that his work in the vernacular must have rattled the bigots. More and more young Pakistani women wear the Arab-styled *hijab* to cover their heads. Yet many of

them are out in the public spaces and finding jobs. The Taliban and their affiliates have attacked CD shops and traditional musicians and singers. At the same time, Pakistan is undergoing a mega music revolution, largely driven by the creative impulse of its young men and women. More Pakistanis are writing in English, even though education standards have fallen and public universities are decaying. Meanwhile, there are private universities all across the country and not all are un-affordable. It has been estimated that nearly half the children in the Punjab province (the largest with a population over 100 million) attend private schools.

The contradictions of contemporary Pakistan are perplexing and defy straitjacketed definitions. While it continues to bleed, a new country is being formed beyond the headlines, the power corridors, and the narrow glare of the media. What could be more telling than the simple fact that despite India-aversion as a pillar of Pakistan's faith, the majority wants trade and normalization. And its conservative, largest party — a political product of the military engineering of 1980s — is the most notable voice for mending fences with the "other," the archrival. This is why the India-hating non-state groups are even more desperate for the spotlight. Mainstream Pakistan wants to move on. This struggle between the old and the new, the doctored and the *desi* (native South Asians), is what will define the country's future.

In the meantime, both of us are likely to survive.

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Rumi's writings are archived at www.razarumi.com. He has published two books with HarperCollins India — *Delhi by Heart: Impressions of a Pakistani Traveller* (2013) and *The Fractious Path: Pakistan's Democratic Transition* (2016). Rumi's journalism, especially in broadcast media, brought him under Islamist surveillance. In March 2014, after surviving an attempt on his life, Rumi left Pakistan for the United States. Here, he has been affiliated with the nonpartisan New American Foundation, the National Endowment for Democracy, and the United States Institute of Peace. Currently writer in residence for Ithaca City of Asylum, Rumi is an international scholar in residence teaching at Ithaca College. He also teaches at the Cornell Institute for Public Affairs and has taught at New York University's Gallatin School of Individualized Study.

Ithaca City of Asylum (ICOA) is a member of the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN), a worldwide network of cities of asylum, supporting writers whose works are suppressed, whose lives are threatened, whose cultures are vanishing, and whose languages are endangered. ICOA is a project of the Center for Transformative Action, a nonprofit organization affiliated with Cornell University, and works in partnership with the area community and colleges.

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